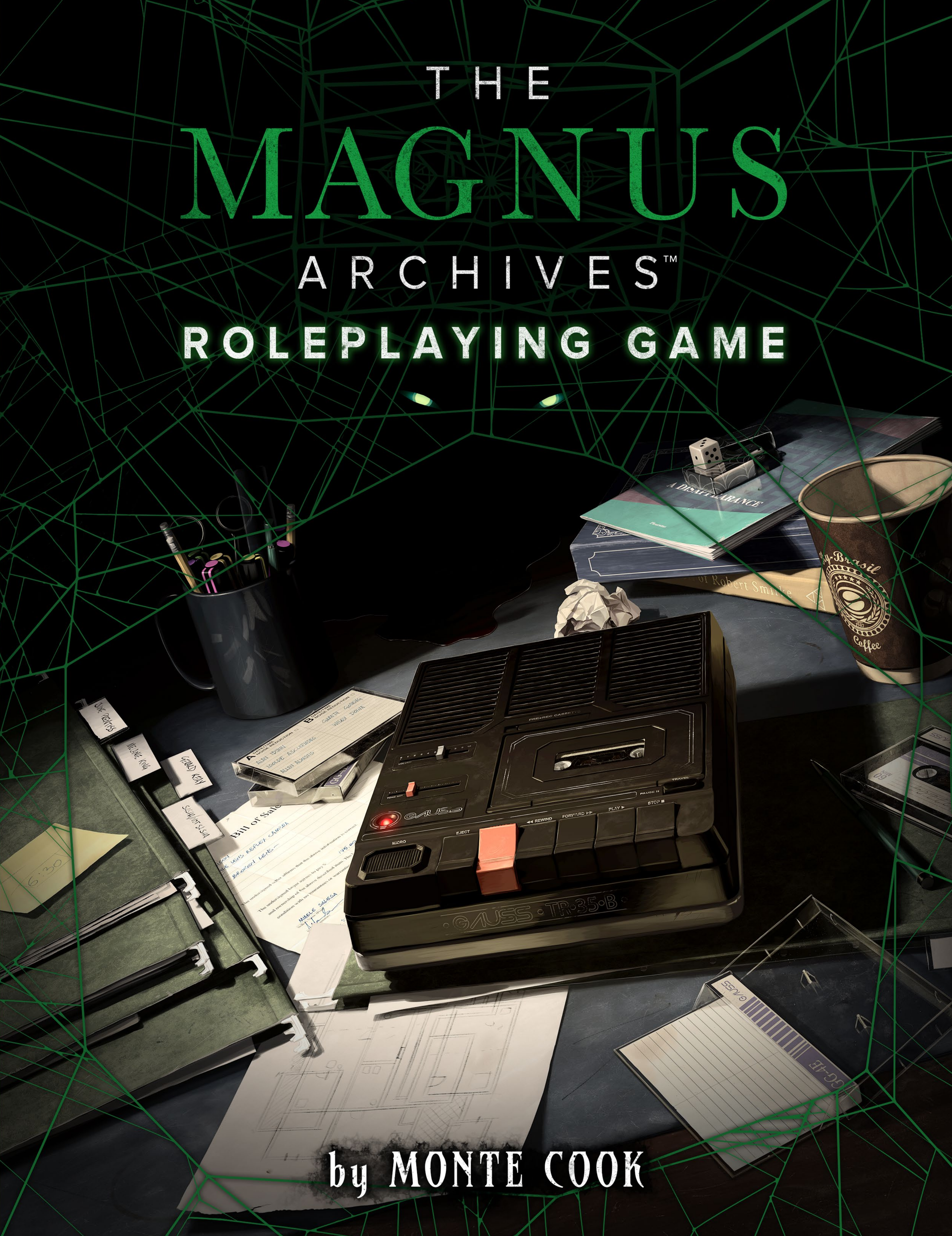
THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES™

ROLEPLAYING GAME

by MONTE COOK


A DISAPPEARANCE
GAUSS
GAUSS · TR-35-B
EJECT
REWIND
FORWARD
PLAY
STOP
PAUSE
Bill of Sale
Coffee

Vigilo-Opperior-Audio

THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES
ROLEPLAYING GAME

CREDITS

Designer	Monte Cook
Additional Design	Bruce R. Cordell
Creative Director	Monte Cook
Developer	Sean K. Reynolds
Managing Editor	Teri Litorco
Editor/Proofreader	Ray Vallese
Design Intern	Shane Zellow
Art Director	Bear Weiter
Graphic Design/Layout	Bear Weiter, Javier P. Beltrán
Cover Artist	Roberto Pitturru

Artists

Paola Andreatta, Javier P. Beltrán, Sam Wolfe Connelly, Giuseppe De iure, Doruk Golcu, Joel Chaim Holtzman, Dharm “Duddum” Khalsa, Macli, Russell Marks, Eric Messinger, Gabriela Novotná, Randy Ortiz, Angelo Peluso, John Petersen, Tani “Ghray” Pettit, Roberto Pitturru, Maichol Quinto, Jericho Rose, Rowan Ryan, Kyle A. Scarborough, Jacopo Schiavo, Elisa Serio, Zoa Smalley, Ben Wootten

The Magnus Archives is co-created by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall and distributed by Rusty Quill Ltd.

Powered by the Cypher System designed by Monte Cook, Bruce R. Cordell, and Sean K. Reynolds.

© 2024 Rusty Quill.
Cypher System content © 2024 Monte Cook Games, LLC.

MONTE COOK GAMES and its logo, and CYPHER SYSTEM and its logo,
are trademarks belonging to Monte Cook Games, LLC in the U.S.A. and other countries.
RUSTY QUILL and its logo, and THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES and its logo, are trademarks belonging to Rusty Quill in the U.S.A. and other countries.
All The Magnus Archives characters and character names, and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of Rusty Quill.

All rights reserved.

Printed in Canada

MONTE COOK GAMES

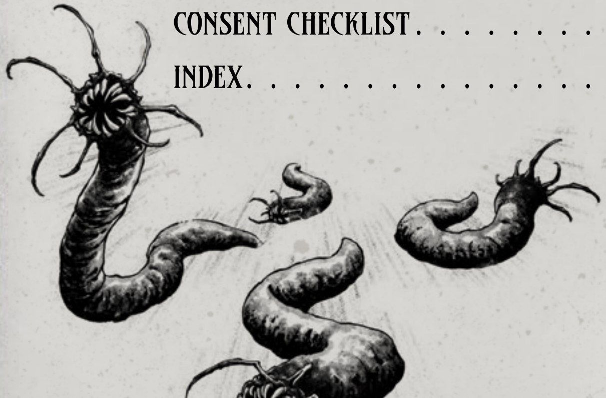
Chief Creative Officer and Founder Monte Cook
Senior Designer and Founder Shanna Germain
Chief Operating Officer Charles Ryan
General Manager Tammie Webb Ryan
Customer Support Manager Jennifer Walls
Marketing Manager Kate Evans
Social Media Coordinator Olivia Ryan
Art Director Bear Weiter
Graphic Designer Javier P. Beltrán
Managing Editor Teri Litorco
Associate Editor Dominique Dickey
Senior Designer Bruce R. Cordell
Designer and Developer Sean K. Reynolds

RUSTY QUILL

Chief Executive Officer Alexander J. Newall
Chief Operations Officer Hannah Brankin
Chief Marketing Officer Callum Dougherty
Production Executive April Summer
Chief Technology Officers Martyn Pratt, Sebastian Hutter
Marketing Manager Hattie Quinlan
Head of Inclusion Helen Gould
Events Manager Jessica Anson
Network Liaison Tom Park
Mastering Engineer and Lead Sound Designer Catherine Rinella
Senior Dialogue Editor Lowri Ann Davies
Audio Editor and Composer Katherine Seaton
Showrunner and Senior Audio Editor Elizabeth Moffatt
Sound Designers Tessa Vroom, Meg McKellar
Senior Dialogue Editor and Composer Nico Vettese
Audio Editor Annie Fitch

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTIONS 4
- CHAPTER 1: BASIC CONCEPTS 7
- CHAPTER 2: CHARACTER DESCRIPTOR AND SKILLS 15
- CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER TYPE 27
- CHAPTER 4: CHARACTER FOCUS 58
- CHAPTER 5: EQUIPMENT 97
- CHAPTER 6: CYPHERS 105
- CHAPTER 7: RULES OF THE GAME 114
- CHAPTER 8: CHARACTER ARCS AND ADVANCEMENT 140
- CHAPTER 9: THE STATEMENT 157
- CHAPTER 10: THE ENTITIES 166
- CHAPTER 11: A WORLD OF FEARS 178
- CHAPTER 12: MONSTERS AND NPCs 192
- CHAPTER 13: ARTEFACTS AND BOOKS 248
- CHAPTER 14: RUNNING THE GAME 285
- CHAPTER 15: ADVENTURE ONE: THE RESURRECTION MOUND 355
- CHAPTER 16: ADVENTURE TWO: LIQUIFY 366
- BACK MATTER 376
  - CREATING YOUR CHARACTER IN NINE EASY STEPS 376
  - RECOMMENDED RESOURCES 377
  - THE MAGNUS INSTITUTE STATEMENT FORM 378
  - CHARACTER SHEET 379
  - CONSENT CHECKLIST 381
  - INDEX 382



INTRODUCTIONS

It's a bit surreal to hold this book in my hands. It feels like the surprising culmination of many different threads that have been woven throughout my life since childhood, and I couldn't be happier about it.

I started roleplaying when I was about 8 years old. My father is one of the original RPG nerds and has been playing pretty much since the hobby's inception in the 70s. As a child I'd sneak down some evenings to watch through the bannisters as he and his friends played. They even let me play (for an hour or so before bedtime), something I'm sure was a bit of a chore for the grown-ups who wanted to play a serious game of Traveller. But I loved it.

So of course I picked up D&D 3rd Edition as soon as it came out. I was twelve years old and had already been playing for a while, but this was the first game that wasn't a part of my dad's collection. It was the first game that was truly mine. The *Dungeon Master's Guide* gave me some advice on GMing that I still lean on today. Little did I realise at the time that I had just had my first run-in with Monte Cook.

Eventually I moved on from D&D towards weirder, less prominent games, but the hobby gave me a deep love of world-building and systems, something that eventually found a very different expression. When I first pitched Alex my idea for an anthology horror podcast in an Edinburgh café one summer afternoon in 2015, he said it needed to be more than standalone stories. It needed an overarching plot. It needed a world. So we started to build one and, drawing upon the lessons from two decades of roleplaying, it was a world with systems and domains and monsters. It doesn't surprise me at all that over the years since *The Magnus Archives* started to get popular, I've seen dozens and dozens of homebrewed rulesets based on the dread powers.

It seemed natural, then, that at some point, we should do a Magnus Archives RPG, but by that point, the scale of it was much larger than could easily be done by either Rusty Quill or MacGuffin & Co. (the small indie RPG press I run with my spouse, Sasha). And then we were approached by Monte Cook Games, and it seemed a little bit like fate. The Cypher System feels like the perfect fit, centring the characters and who they are, rather than a sheet full of numbers, and I'm delighted by the way the Entities have been brought to life. And the art!

I can only hope everyone who reads this is as thrilled by The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game as I am. A lot of love went into these pages. And a lot of fear.

Jonathan Sims

Hi everyone—Alex here,

I'd just like to take a moment to thank you for helping to support this project and tell you how honoured I am to present to you this official RPG based on *The Magnus Archives* podcast, designed by the fantastic folks at Monte Cook Games.

If you know nothing about *The Magnus Archives*, don't worry! This book contains everything you will need to play. All you really need to know is that a place called the Magnus Institute takes statements from witnesses to bizarre and horrifying events and starts to connect the dots. Everything after that can be discovered as you play, often with terrifying results.

For those of you who are already familiar with what we do, here you will find everything you need to play your favourite characters and their statements, but not only that, we've filled it with original elements as well so you can explore new ground if you dare!

As for all the backers of this game, thank you so much. Our weird little group of horror nerds and gaming geeks could never have put all this together without your support. We truly hope you enjoy the result and all the associated goodies you unlocked to accompany it. I honestly think we all enjoyed making them as much as you will enjoy having them.

I'd also like to acknowledge the deeply dedicated Monte Cook Games team. They have an incredible enthusiasm for *The Magnus Archives* and really understand what it is that makes *Archives* unique. The focus on characters, their personal choices and the unknowable consequences that follow; the new mechanics around fear, its flavours and its effects; the monster profiles and artwork that faithfully capture the essence of the show; our precious little nightmare could not have been in safer hands.

I would also like to commend Jonny Sims. Though I am an experienced tabletop gamer and GM, my knowledge has paled in comparison to his expertise in the field, and seeing him work with Monte Cook to translate our stories of unknowable horrors into a clear, concise work like this has been a privilege to watch.

Lastly, I would like to thank you, the reader, whether you are a diehard fan with passionate feelings about Mr. Spider, or just someone who has plucked this at random off a shelf on an idle afternoon. The original *Magnus Archives* is the summation of years of passion, and that passion has been extended here, so knowing that you are reading these words ahead of what we hope will be years of horrifying and fulfilling time with friends is truly humbling. So thank you, on behalf of myself and the countless number of people who have come together to birth this eldritch abomination (in a good way).

That's all for now, so it's with great joy in my heart I get to say one more time . . . Statement Begins.

AE

Alexander J. Newall

I vividly remember sitting down, putting my headphones on, and pressing play on my phone to listen to the first episode of *The Magnus Archives*. I was immediately drawn in by the atmosphere, the creepiness of the tale, the writing, the voice acting, and—if I'm being an honest Anglophile—the British-ness of it all. (I am one of those Americans who is both charmed and entranced by all things British. Always have been.) I don't think I got up from where I was sitting until I'd absorbed at least three episodes. I saw that we were going to get a creepy story each episode and, what's more, that the narrator and the Magnus Archives themselves weren't just a framing story. I could see that these people doing the investigation and the archiving of the paranormal were the story. And that's when my game-brain kicked in. Because now these stories were game-able. It's the titular Magnus Archives themselves that make the RPG work in a way that a bunch of unrelated spooky tales, no matter how good, would not. The first question a game designer should ask when starting to work on an RPG is "What do the characters do?" *The Magnus Archives* answered that question for me.

Fast forward (metaphorically) nearly 200 episodes. I'm about to listen to the last couple of episodes after devouring the harrowing final season. At this point I've already committed to designing the game and my company is going to publish it. I just have one lingering concern. I struggle with licensed RPGs sometimes because the GM's creativity is often hampered by all the mountains of canon material. The GM is forced into the role of being an expert on the details of a setting they didn't create. For some, that's fun, but for others, it's taxing. It's why I don't work on licensed games much anymore—but, I shrugged, this setting was fun and imaginative enough to make up for that. And then I got to the finale of the show and that one last concern melted away as if touched by Agnes Montague herself. Without spoiling the end—although, to be very clear, reading the rest of this book will absolutely spoil the end, so if that's important to you, listen to the podcast first—the story of the Magnus Archives wraps up in such a way that individual GMs' creativity is empowered rather than hindered. The end of the story unleashes creativity in precisely the way an RPG setting should.

Fans of the Cypher System will see a lot of changes to the base game in this rulebook, and crafting those changes to tailor the game to the setting was a labor of pure love. I think you'll find yourself able to play a game that is truly as dangerous, terrifying, and perhaps even meaningful as the stories in the podcast. I couldn't be happier to have worked on this game, immersed myself in the setting (I've listened to the podcast multiple times now), and gotten to know Jonny and Alex. Rusty Quill has been a pleasure to work with at every step of the way. The whole experience has been great.

Monte Cook

CHAPTER 1

BASIC CONCEPTS

The Magnus Archives is a horror fiction anthology podcast examining what lurks in the archives of the Magnus Institute, an organization dedicated to researching the esoteric and the weird. It follows the actions of head archivist Jonathan Sims as he attempts to bring a seemingly neglected collection of supernatural statements up to date, converting them to audio and supplementing them with follow-up work from his small but dedicated team.

Individually, these stories—these "statements"—are unsettling. Together they begin to form a picture that is truly horrifying because as one looks into the depths of the archives, something starts to look back…

In The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game (RPG), you and your friends take on the roles of archival assistants assigned to investigate the strange occurrences reported to the Institute by those that have encountered the mysterious and supernatural. What you hold in your hands is an overview of the game and its workings. This rulebook provides you with everything you need to play, including the complete rules; detailed character creation; an extensive overview of the Entities, monsters, books, artefacts, and characters that make *The Magnus Archives* so enthralling (and terrifying); and some adventures to challenge and terrify your group. It's everything you need to play, whether with the investigations presented or with terrors you craft yourself.

SPOILERS!

Be forewarned, this book is filled with spoilers for the podcast, up to and including the very end. If you haven't listened to every episode and don't want the stories and revelations spoiled, put this book down and get to listening!

It's worth noting that this book does not include anything from outside the bounds of the five seasons of *The Magnus Archives* podcast and its canon, including the episodes specifically labeled as not being a part of the "Magnus canon" and the entirety of *The Magnus Protocol* podcast.

The Magnus Protocol *is the prequel/sequel to* The Magnus Archives *podcast.*

SPEAKING OF SPOILERS

If you've listened to the entire five seasons of *The Magnus Archives* podcast, you know that in the end, the Entities escape the world of The Archivist, Martin, and the others. It's all a grand scheme of The Web, and it relies on specific actions (or inaction) on the part of the main characters. This sets up The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game. Since the Entities have moved to other worlds in the multiverse, you'll create your stories in one of these worlds. This is great news, because it gives you the freedom to adhere to as much or as little of the canon of the podcast as you wish. Jonathan, Martin, Basira, and Daisy can be your player characters, but they could equally be other archival staff of the Magnus

GLOSSARY

Game master (GM): The player who doesn't run a character, but instead guides the flow of the story and runs all the NPCs.

Nonplayer character (NPC): Characters run by the GM. Think of them as the minor characters in the story, or the villains or opponents. This includes any kind of creature as well as people.

Party: A group of player characters (and perhaps some NPC allies).

Player character (PC): A character run by a player rather than the GM. Think of the PCs as the main characters in the story.

Player: The players who run characters in the game.

Session: A single play experience. Usually this lasts a few hours. Sometimes, one adventure can be accomplished in a single session. More often, one adventure takes multiple sessions. Think of a session as similar to an episode of the podcast.

Adventure: A single portion of the campaign with a beginning, middle, and end. This is usually defined at the beginning by a goal put forth by the PCs and at the end by whether or not they achieve that goal. This is similar to a full story in the podcast, and in fact, in this book we'll often use the word "story" as synonymous for "adventure." We also frequently use "investigation" to describe Magnus Archives adventures. In the podcast, for example, the assault on the Institute in season one of the podcast might be considered an adventure in the game. In season three, Jon's trip to America would be another adventure. Just like stories in the podcast, the events of different adventures can bleed into one another, and they almost always affect later adventures in the campaign.

Campaign: A series of sessions strung together with an overarching story (or linked stories) with the same player characters. Often, but not always, a campaign involves multiple adventures. In the podcast, a whole season could be thought of as a campaign—or, alternatively, the entire show could be a single grand campaign!

Character: Anything that can act in the game. Although this includes PCs and human NPCs, it also includes creatures, ghosts, vampires, and so on. The word "creature" is usually synonymous.

Entities: The Entities, also called the Fears, the Powers, the Dread Powers, and the Things That We Fear are cosmic horrors beyond total understanding, but are believed to be responsible for the supernatural phenomena that feature in the stories. In essence, they use their powers to evoke fear from victims and thereby sustain themselves.

Avatar: A being imbued with the occult power of the Entities. This being might have started out a mortal and gained this power, or they might have been created by the Entities. They may have their own motives, but all Avatars indirectly serve to provide fear to the Entities.

Cypher: A bit of luck, inspiration, hope, or resilience that grants a character an ability that can be used once. Cyphers are entirely conceptual, and new cyphers can be gained through rest and relaxation. In many ways, they are the opposite of Stress, which can be a hindrance to player characters in this game.

Artefact: An object imbued with the occult power of the Entities. We spell it that way because the folks who created the podcast spell it that way.

Canon: In the podcast, everything that happens is canon. The characters, stories, and events are all set in stone. But in your campaign, you can use as much or as little of the canon as you want.

Institute, or you might create a completely different institute or similar organization, set wherever you wish your stories to take place. Your campaign might include different side characters and creatures, end up very differently than the podcast, and reveal new truths about the Entities. It's up to you.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Each character has a simple statement that describes them, like: "I am an [adjective] [noun] who [verb]."

For example, Martin Blackwood might be a Nervous Investigator who Helps Their Friends. Jonathan Sims is a Scholarly Elocutionist who Solves Mysteries.

In this sentence, the *adjective* is called your descriptor. Your descriptor offers a few modifications to your stats and skills and provides a roleplaying hook to start with an important aspect of your character's personality or nature. Descriptors include Fearless, Likeable, Scholarly, Hopeful, Bold, Quick, and more.

The *noun* is your character type. If descriptor is what sort of person you are, type is the core of who you are. It's the fundamental way that the character interacts with the world and how they approach each challenge. It's the noun of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*." You can choose from four main character types: Investigator, Protector, Elocutionist, and Occultist. Occultists are the least common of these, as they actually try to utilize the occult—always a dangerous thing in the world of The Magnus Archives.

The *verb* is called your focus. Focus is what your character does best. Foci include Explores Dark Places, Helps Their Friends, Moves Like a Cat, Practically Lives Online, Solves Mysteries, Would Rather Be Reading, and more.

As the game progresses, a character might also become an Avatar of one of the Entities. Doing so results in taking on another, specialized focus. So Jonathan Sims becomes a Scholarly Elocutionist who Solves Mysteries and Serves as an Avatar of The Eye.

CHARACTER STATS

Every player character has three defining characteristics, which are typically called "statistics" or "stats." These stats are Might, Speed, and Intellect. They are broad categories that cover many different but related aspects of a character.

MIGHT

Might defines how strong and durable your character is. The concepts of strength, endurance, constitution, hardiness, and physical prowess are all folded into this one stat. Might isn't relative to size; instead, it's an absolute measurement. An elephant has more Might than the mightiest tiger, which has more Might than the mightiest rat, which has more Might than the mightiest (mundane) spider.

Might governs actions from forcing doors open to walking for days without food to resisting disease. Hitting someone in a hand-to-hand fight relies on Might as well. Occasionally, a paranormal power a character gains access to draws upon their physical essence, draining points of Might. Physical characters, tough characters, and characters interested in fighting should focus on Might.

SPEED

Speed describes how fast and physically coordinated your character is. The stat embodies quickness, movement, dexterity, and reflexes. Speed governs such divergent actions as dodging attacks, sneaking around quietly, and throwing a ball accurately. It helps determine whether you can move farther on your turn. Nimble, fast, or sneaky characters will want good Speed stats, as will those interested in ranged combat.

Action, page 116

Hinder, page 119

A task is any action a character takes that is difficult enough that the outcome is uncertain. The success is determined by a die roll, and the die result needed is determined by the difficulty level of the task. Skills and Effort can improve the odds of a character's success, as each step a task is eased by reduces the difficulty level of the task.

Task, page 116

Ease, page 118

INTELLECT

This stat determines how smart, knowledgeable, and likeable your character is. It includes intelligence, wisdom, charisma, education, reasoning, wit, willpower, and charm. Intellect governs solving puzzles, remembering facts, telling convincing lies, and using mental powers. Characters interested in communicating effectively, being learned scholars, or wielding supernatural powers should stress their Intellect stat.

SKILLS (AND INABILITIES)

Your character has training in a handful of specific skills. For example, you might be trained in stealth, gymnastics, persuasion, or engineering. A character's level of skill is either trained (reasonably skilled) or specialized (very skilled).

If you are trained in a skill relating to a task, you ease that task by one step. If you are specialized, you ease it by two steps. A skill can never ease a task by more than two steps, but you can use a skill and Effort together.

You can always attempt any action—you do not need to be trained or specialized in a related skill. In other words, being trained in driving doesn't let you drive a car; it just makes you good at it. Anyone can still try to drive. It's just a bit harder.

Some characters have inabilities. If a character has an inability in a task, the task is hindered (more difficult).

POOL, EDGE, AND EFFORT

Each of the three stats has two components: Pool and Edge. Your Pool represents your raw, innate ability, and your Edge represents knowing how to use what you have. A third element ties into this concept: Effort. When your character really needs to accomplish a task, you apply Effort.

POOL

Your Pool is the most basic measurement of a stat. Comparing the Pools of two creatures will give you a general sense of which creature is superior in that stat. For example, a character who has a Might Pool of 16 is stronger (in a basic sense) than a character who has a Might Pool of 12. Most characters start with a Pool of 9 to 12 in most stats—that's the average range.

You can spend points from one of your stat Pools to decrease a task's difficulty (see Effort, below). You can rest to recover lost points from a stat Pool, and some special abilities or cyphers might allow you to recover lost points quickly.

EDGE

Although your Pool is the basic measurement of a stat, your Edge is also important. When something requires you to spend points from a stat Pool, your Edge for that stat reduces the cost. It also reduces the cost of applying Effort to a roll.

For example, let's say you have the Eye for Detail ability, and activating it costs 2 points from your Intellect Pool. Subtract your Intellect Edge from the activation cost, and the result is how many points you must spend to use the ability. If using your Edge reduces the cost to 0, you can use the ability for free.

Your Edge can be different for each stat. For example, you could have a Might Edge of 1, a Speed Edge of 1, and an Intellect Edge of 0. You'll always have an Edge of at least 1 in one stat. Your Edge for a stat reduces the cost of spending points from that stat Pool, but not from other Pools. Once a stat's Edge reaches 3, you can apply one level of Effort for free.

EFFORT

When your character really needs to accomplish a task, you can apply Effort. For a beginning character, applying Effort requires spending 3 points from the stat Pool appropriate to the action. Thus, if your character tries to dodge an attack (a Speed roll) and wants to increase the chance for success, you can apply Effort by spending 3 points from your Speed Pool. Effort eases the task by one step. This is called applying one level of Effort.

You don't have to apply Effort if you don't want to. If you choose to apply Effort to a task, you must do it before you attempt the roll—you can't roll first and then decide to apply Effort if you rolled poorly.

Applying more Effort can lower a task's difficulty further: each additional level of Effort eases the task by another step. Applying one level of Effort eases the task by one step, applying two levels eases the task by two steps, and so on. However, each level of Effort after the first costs only 2 points from the stat Pool instead of 3. So applying two levels of Effort costs 5 points (3 for the first level plus 2 for the second level), applying three levels costs 7 points (3 plus 2 plus 2), and so on.

Every character has an Effort score, which indicates the maximum number of levels of Effort that can be applied to a roll. A beginning (first-tier) character has an Effort of 1, meaning you can apply only one level of Effort to a roll. A more experienced character has a higher Effort score and can apply more levels of Effort to a roll. For example, a character who has an Effort of 3 can apply up to three levels of Effort to reduce a task's difficulty.

When you apply Effort, subtract your relevant Edge from the total cost of applying Effort. For example, let's say you need to make a Speed roll. To increase your chance for success, you decide to apply one level of Effort, which will ease the task. Normally, that would cost 3 points from your Speed Pool. However, you have a Speed Edge of 2, so you subtract that from the cost. Thus, applying Effort to the roll costs only 1 point from your Speed Pool.

What if you applied two levels of Effort to the Speed roll instead of just one? That would ease the task by two steps. Normally, it would cost 5 points from your Speed Pool, but after subtracting your Speed Edge of 2, it costs only 3 points.

Skills and other advantages also ease a task, and you can use them in conjunction with Effort. In addition, your character might have

Your character's type (see chapter 3) determines your starting Pool amounts.

Determining Task Difficulty, page 117

Eye for Detail, page 30

For more details on recovery and healing, see page 135.

special abilities or equipment that allow you to apply Effort to accomplish a special effect, such as knocking down a foe with an attack or affecting multiple targets with a power that normally affects only one.

In a fight, instead of applying Effort to ease your attack, you can apply Effort to increase the amount of damage you inflict with an attack. For each level of Effort you apply in this way, you inflict 3 additional points of damage. This works for any kind of attack that inflicts damage, whether a sword, a gun, an occult ability, or something else.

STRESS AND INJURY

There are two ways that characters can suffer damage. One is Stress, and the other is injury. Stress reflects things that affect a character briefly, such as a shock, a bad experience, or a minor wound (the kind that causes a bit of distress, but is usually better with a breather or a small bandage). Injury is actual, serious physical wounds that might send you to the hospital. Or the morgue.

Stress is tracked as it accumulates on your character. A minor injury might give you 1 or 2 Stress. Likewise, a terrible shock or horrific experience might give you 2 or 3 Stress. For every 3 points of Stress you accumulate, you have 1 level of Stress. A level of Stress hinders all actions.

Damage track, page 132

More serious injuries, like being shot by a gun, gored by a creature, or hit by a car, move you down the damage track. The four steps of the damage track are as follows:

Hale: You're fine.

Major effects, minor effects, and special rolls, page 119

Impaired: Every time you apply Effort, it costs you 1 additional point from the stat you are using. You also ignore minor and major effect results on your rolls and don't deal extra damage in combat with a special roll.

Some particularly tough characters have an additional step in between hale and impaired called hurt. There are no penalties associated with being hurt.

Debilitated is a critically injured state. A debilitated character may not take any actions other than to move (probably crawl).

Dead is dead.

ALLEVIATING STRESS, HEALING INJURIES, AND RECOVERING POINTS IN A POOL

Rest allows you to reduce Stress and recover lost points in your Pools. You reduce your Stress by 3 points (1 level) for each hour you rest. To get back points in a Pool, you need to make a recovery roll, which is 1d6 + 1 points per tier. The amount of time you need to rest to make a recovery roll depends on how many recovery rolls you've already made that day.

Recovery Roll	Rest Time Needed
First recovery roll	One action
Second recovery roll	Ten minutes
Third recovery roll	One hour
Fourth recovery roll	Ten hours

If you are seriously injured, you'll likely have to rest for at least a day if not more, and you should consider going to a hospital.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Character types and foci grant PCs special abilities. These can just be cool things you can do, like taking an extra action or finding really obscure information on the internet, but they can also be supernatural abilities. Using these abilities usually costs points from your stat Pools (listed in parentheses after the ability name). Your Edge in the appropriate stat can reduce the cost. If you don't have enough points in a Pool to use a particular ability, you can't do so until you recover some points in that Pool. Supernatural abilities also inflict Stress when you use them.

CYPHERS

Cyphers are single-use abilities awarded by the GM. Reflecting a character's state of mind or the whims of fate, these capricious abilities allow a character to get a quick recovery of stat Pool points or a boost in a specific type of action. Each character has a cypher limit indicating how many cyphers they can have at the same time.

Characters easily regain new cyphers by resting, so players shouldn't hesitate to use their cyphers.

ARTEFACTS

Artefacts are powerful items that can be used many times. But using them is risky, because artefacts are always imbued with the powers and essence of the Entities. Using them inflicts Stress on a character. From the podcast, the web table or one of Jurgen Leitner's books would be considered an artefact.

We use the British spelling of "artefacts" because that's what the podcast does . . . and we just think it's cool.

CONSENT AND SAFETY TOOLS

The Magnus Archives RPG is, at its heart, a horror game. That means it's important to use good consent and safety tools in your game. These tools ensure that everyone gets scared or uncomfortable only as much as they want to be, and that everyone has consented to the premise and expectations of the game. This is sometimes described as the difference between "good uncomfortable" (something that makes you squirm in your seat in a great horror movie) and "bad uncomfortable" (something that makes you feel nauseated, in danger, or offended). Being scared can be fun, but feeling unsafe isn't.

You might be perfectly comfortable with viscous, many-eyed creatures rising up out of the ground during a game but feel uncomfortable with the idea of your character being buried alive. You might enjoy fighting giant spiders but don't want to hurt anything that looks or sounds like a dog. Maybe you're all in on hearing the gory details of what happens when you dismember someone but have no interest in an explicit description of a skin rash.

Whatever your thing is, you have the right to not have it in your game.

At the back of this book, you'll find a consent checklist that can be used when planning a game. It includes many of the scary or uncomfortable things you'll find in The Magnus Archives. As with the general checklist in the *Consent in Gaming* PDF, the GM can print or photocopy one for each player and themselves. Each player then fills out their own form and returns it to the GM. By having a conversation about consent ahead of time and using the consent and safety tools, you can ensure that you—and the rest of your group—get all the scares you ask for and none of the ones you don't.

Consent Checklist, page 381

For additional information on consent and safety tools, download the free Consent in Gaming *PDF at myMCG.info/consent.*

IMPORTANT NOTES ABOUT CONSENT

- You decide what's safe and right for you.
- No one has to explain their choices.
- There's a spectrum of consent for each topic.
- Anyone can always change their mind about what they are or aren't consenting to.
- Anyone is allowed to leave an uncomfortable situation at any time.

Excerpts from the podcast appear throughout the book, identified by the episode number (such as MAG 126) and name.

> The structure he held in his hands made my eyes hurt. Thin, sharp lines angling off from each other in an incredibly intricate arrangement, although they never seemed to actually connect with each other. It shifted like the other one and I felt something jabbing at my skull like a migraine. Finally, the lines seemed to resolve into a clear shape: a door.
>
> "Perfect!" Gabriel told me. "It looks just like him."
>
> I asked him if it was supposed to be a face, and he told me yes, it was a good friend of his. I asked him who, and he said they didn't have a name. I told him everyone has a name, and he said his friend wasn't like us, that having a name would only confuse them.
>
> My head was pounding. I looked over at Ray, still nodding and smiling, and then over at Bill, who was steadily shoveling fistfuls of the clay Mary into his mouth. I don't remember anything more of that lesson.
>
> —MAG 126: "Sculptor's Tool"

CORE OF GAMEPLAY

The core of gameplay in The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game—the answer to the question "What do characters do in this game?"—is "investigate supernatural occurrences and gather knowledge, ultimately to attempt to hold back the machinations of the Entities that threaten all humanity."

Usually, this involves following up on the statements given to the Magnus Institute, and these are presented by people who describe their supernatural encounters. Starting with the information in the statement, the PCs interview witnesses, search locations, look for supernatural beings, seek artefacts and books that might be involved, and record and catalog everything they discover.

As the PCs conduct these investigations, their skills and abilities improve, and their knowledge of the truth behind the supernatural Entities at the very edges of our world increases. Encounters with the supernatural can lead to the characters gaining mysterious powers and even becoming Avatars. But is that a blessing or a curse? (Hint: In the short term, it might be useful, but long term, it's probably a curse.)

As this is a horror game, the GM's main role isn't to build horrible foes to challenge the players (although there is some of that) but rather to portray the ever-escalating terror of the stories that arise from the ongoing investigations. Fear is what The Magnus Archives is all about, and that fear grows from a rising dread and a realization of the implications of what happens in each session. In other words, it gets more horrific over time. It's not about jump scares; it's about the horror of learning the truth.

In this way, The Magnus Archives is a sort of cosmic horror, which means that knowledge can be more valuable than riches but even so, some aspects of the supernatural are unknowable. Just be warned, with knowledge of the forbidden, there's often a price that must be paid. Knowledge is a dangerous thing.

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTER DESCRIPTOR AND SKILLS

> The next day he was there again, this time in the hallway outside my office, standing in the centre so that I had to hug the wall to avoid touching his motionless form. He was identical, except that his T-shirt was now a dull orange. I asked my colleague Norma what she thought of him, why he was there and if she noticed anything strange about him. She looked out into the corridor, then looked back at me and shook her head. She told me he "seemed normal enough," but her eyes were like blank pits, and I knew she was lying about all of it. Had he done this? Had he taken Norma's self, her, her soul? Or had she always been a zombie, cramped into her little open plan desk, patiently listening to client complaints, and I just hadn't noticed?
>
> —MAG 122: "Zombie"

This chapter introduces skills and descriptors for your character. The descriptor you choose typically grants you an associated skill, which is probably your character's first brush with gaining a skill.

SKILLS

A skill is a category of knowledge, ability, or activity relating to a task, such as driving, geography, or persuasion. A character who has a skill is better at completing related tasks than a character who lacks the skill, but even an unskilled character can attempt the task. A character's level of skill is either trained (reasonably skilled) or specialized (very skilled).

If you are trained in a skill relating to a task, you ease that task by one step. If you are specialized, you ease it by two steps. A skill can never ease a task by more than two steps.

Easing the task, page 118

The descriptor you choose typically grants you one associated skill.

If you are trained in a skill and get training again in the same skill, you are specialized in that skill.

You can also have an inability in a specific task. An inability is a task your character isn't good at. You can think of inabilities as negative skills—instead of those tasks being eased, they're hindered.

Hinder, page 119

If you have neither training nor an inability, you are practiced at that task. This is something you can do, but you do it neither

SKILL LIST

- Astronomy
- Biology
- Carpentry
- Cooking
- Deception
- Discerning motive
- Disguise
- Driving
- Electrical repair
- Electronics
- Endurance
- Engineering
- Equipment operation
- Forensics
- Geography
- Geology
- Gunsmithing
- Gymnastics
- Healing
- History
- Identifying
- Initiative
- Intimidation
- Leatherworking
- Lockpicking
- Mathematics
- Mechanics
- Medicine
- Metalworking
- Occultism
- Perception
- Performance
- Persuasion
- Philosophy
- Physics
- Pickpocketing
- Piloting
- Plumbing
- Programming
- Psychology
- Publishing
- Religion
- Researching
- Riding
- Sewing
- Stealth
- Tracking

better nor worse than the average person. Most people, for example, are practiced in driving and drive every day to get places, but they would be seriously challenged to come out of a spin after going much too fast on an icy road.

To carry on with the example of driving, a person who's never been behind the wheel might have an inability in driving. A professional driver, like a bus or truck driver or an auto aficionado, might be trained in driving. A race car driver, stunt driver, or criminal getaway driver might be specialized in driving.

SKILL DESCRIPTIONS

The skills presented here are intentionally somewhat broad so you can choose a skill that best fits the kind of character you're creating. For instance, if you want to play a character good at hacking electronic systems, writing code, or prompt engineering, programming is the skill for you. If you'd prefer a character who was a manual laborer prior to their introduction to the setting, endurance or equipment operation are good options. If your character is a nurse, dentist, or doctor, choose medicine. And so on.

That said, several specific trade skills like carpentry, plumbing, leatherworking, and electrical repair appear on the skills list. But many more exist. If you'd prefer your character have a different trade—like hairdresser, mortician, or HVAC technician—work with your GM to add that skill to your game.

The following descriptions are a high-level summary for each skill.

Astronomy: You are well-versed in the study of the stars, planets, and cosmology in general.

Biology: You have a deep working knowledge of living systems, including animals, plants, and insects.

Carpentry: Your woodworking expertise allows you to craft a wide range of objects and structures, from furniture and cabinetry to home framing and related structural work.

Cooking: You excel at preparing delicious meals of various cuisines and using a host of culinary techniques.

Deception: You are a capable liar, able to use speech and the written word to deceive and misinform others.

Discerning motive: You're practiced at ascertaining another character's lies, motives, and disposition.

Disguise: You're adept at disguising your identity with a false appearance using minimal accoutrements, usually with whatever's at hand.

Disguising your appearance to impersonate a specific person requires special materials, makeup, and at least an hour of preparation to make a credible attempt.

Driving: You can keep a car or truck on the road even under trying driving conditions.

Electrical repair: You trained under an electrician and have at least a journeyman's technical knowledge (or more) of electrical systems, allowing you to install, repair, and maintain most modern technology that uses electricity.

Electronics: You can design, build, troubleshoot, and repair electronic circuits and devices.

Endurance: Regular training has improved your physical fitness, easing your climbing, jumping, and swimming tasks, plus similar feats that require sustained strength.

Engineering: You can design, analyze, and create innovative solutions for complex problems, utilizing scientific principles and technological knowledge.

Equipment operation: You're proficient in operating various heavy machinery used in construction projects, such as bulldozers, cranes, excavators, pavers, rollers, and more.

Forensics: You know how to interpret physical evidence to figure out what happened at a location, such as at a crime scene, or what may have led to an object's current condition, such as the cause of death for a body.

Geography: You are well-versed in earthly landscapes, countries, human populations, and maps in general.

Geology: You're knowledgeable about Earth's structure, composition, and processes (including expertise regarding earthquakes, volcanoes, and the formation of natural resources).

Gunsmithing: You're proficient in crafting, repairing, and customizing firearms and ammunition.

Gymnastics: Regular training has improved your balance, easing your tasks to avoid losing your footing, as well as attempts to roll, dive, flip, or perform similar acrobatic movements.

Healing: You can attempt to diagnose physical illness and are skilled with healing tasks.

History: You're well-versed in the study of past events, societies, and cultures.

Identifying: Your analytical mind allows you to venture a guess regarding the origin of unfamiliar objects, texts, sounds, and so on.

Initiative: Your reactions are honed, easing your initiative tasks in combat.

Intimidation: You're good at swaying others with threatening words and/or fearsome presence.

Leatherworking: You are adept at crafting a wide range of leather goods, including belts, bags, and clothing.

Lockpicking: You are proficient at unlocking a locked mechanism without the key.

Mathematics: You're a whiz with numbers, calculations, and pattern analysis.

Mechanics: You can diagnose, repair, maintain, and (with the right tools and parts) build engines and various machines.

Medicine: You're skilled in general medicine, a medical specialty, nursing, dentistry, optometry, audiology, or a similar practice.

Metalworking: You can shape, weld, and otherwise use various metals to craft objects, from art and jewelry to mechanical parts and structural elements.

Occultism: You study supernatural lore, including parapsychology, paranormal events, and the existence of secret organizations. You have a working knowledge of tarot or a similar divining practice.

Perception: You have a better chance to notice what others miss in a physical environment when searching an area, listening closely, or using some other sense to discover what's hidden or not obvious.

Performance: You are skilled in some kind of performance or art, whether that's singing, comedy, playing an instrument, acting on a stage, composing, painting, or something else.

Persuasion: You're adept at winning people to your side of an argument with a combination of truthful reasoning (at least, true as far as you know), understanding, and kindness.

Philosophy: You're conversant with critically analyzing questions regarding existence, knowledge, ethics, and similar fundamental issues.

Physics: You're knowledgeable about scientifically derived laws of the physical

Initiative, page 125

Supernatural lore and occultism doesn't usually include knowledge of the Entities and their Avatars, which is usually only gained through playing the game.

The Entities, page 166

Healing, page 135

universe and can use that knowledge to devise experiments to probe natural phenomena.

Pickpocketing: You're skilled in separating a target from their wallet, phone, or other easily concealed valuables. You're also skilled with sleight-of-hand tricks.

Piloting: You're skilled in piloting planes, boats, or submersibles.

Plumbing: You can install, maintain, and repair pipes, fixtures, and appliances that use water.

Programming: You can code computers and computer architectures, which you can use to write applications, develop new systems, and try to infiltrate protected digital systems.

Character Type, page 27

Character Focus, page 58

Psychology: You're conversant with the study of human behavior and therapies developed to address mental health.

Publishing: You're skilled with some aspect of publishing, such as writing, editing, copywriting, proofing, marketing, or something else.

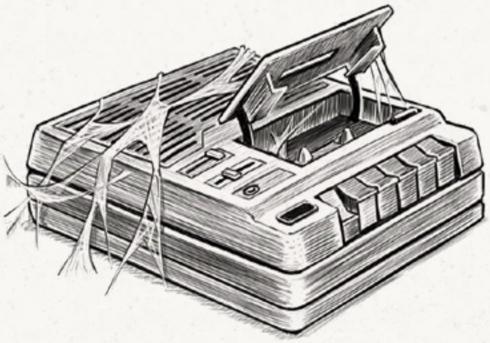
Inabilities, page 15

Religion: You're a pastor or religious leader in a particular faith and/or are knowledgeable about the study of religious beliefs, practices, and traditions.

Some players might be hesitant to create a character that has a "negative" skill, but in truth, what inabilities really do is make more interesting and complex characters who are often great fun to play, and to play with. Remember that characters are defined as much by what they're not *good at as by what they* are *good at.*

Researching: You're skilled at gathering information from databases and physical archives, and/or hitting the pavement and asking around; all these forms of research require a minimum of a few hours.

Riding: You're skilled at riding a horse, camel, or similar mount. Alternatively, you're skilled at riding a motorcycle or bicycle.



Sewing: You're skilled in creating or repairing clothing or anything else out of cloth.

Stealth: You're adept at sneaking and hiding, staying out of sight, and keeping all noise of your presence to a minimum.

Tracking: You know how to track a target through natural landscapes and urban environments.

OPTION: CHOOSE A SECOND DESCRIPTOR SKILL

Your descriptor typically grants one specific skill related to the descriptor.

If you wish, you can pick a second skill when you choose your descriptor, or pick it later after you choose your type or focus, when you know more about the shape your character is taking.

If you choose to take an additional skill, keep the following two things in mind.

- You can pick almost any skill as an additional skill except for an attack skill.
- Taking an extra skill also requires that you choose an inability relevant to the descriptor. An inability is a task your character isn't good at.

To be "relevant," your inability must be reasonably expected to come up a few times in the game, such as defense tasks (Speed, Intellect, and Might), interaction tasks (like persuasion or discerning motive), and combat tasks (like initiative). An irrelevant inability might be plumbing, physics, or some other skill the GM knows will rarely or never apply.

Work with your GM to pick an appropriate inability for your chosen skill. Each descriptor has a suggestion that would be appropriate.

If you become skilled at a task that you have an inability with, they cancel each other out, making you practiced with that skill (not eased or hindered).

DESCRIPTORS

CHARACTER DESCRIPTORS

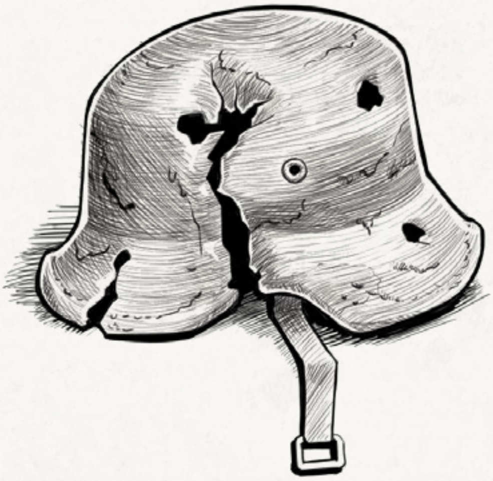
Bold
Brave
Caring
Cautious
Cheerful
Cynical
Enigmatic
Fastidious
Fearless
Ferocious
Hopeful
Inquisitive
Intimidating
Likeable
Muscular
Nervous
No-Nonsense
Obsessive
Pretentious
Quick
Ruthless
Scholarly
Smart
Sturdy
Superstitious
Suspicious
Tech-Savvy

Choose one of the descriptors in this chapter for your character. You can pick any descriptor you wish regardless of your type.

Your descriptor helps define your character—it influences everything you do. The differences between a Cautious Protector and a Fearless Protector are considerable. A descriptor may sway the way those characters face each new challenge. Your descriptor helps provide motivation. It is the adjective of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

Descriptors offer a one-time package of characteristics, which usually includes one skill and a boost to one of your stat Pools.

Your descriptor matters most when you're a beginning character. The benefits that come from your descriptor will eventually be overshadowed by the growing importance of your type and focus. However, the influence of your descriptor will remain at least somewhat important throughout your character's life.



BOLD

You're self-assertive, confident in your abilities, and energetic. Some call you brash. Whatever; you don't give a stuff what anyone thinks, unless they're your friends. Even then, you argue that waiting around to learn more about the situation before acting is certain to cede the initiative to someone else.

You gain the following characteristics:

Energetic: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in initiative.

Suggested Second Skill: Intellect defense or endurance.

Suggested Inability: You were never good at studying or retaining facts. You have an inability in researching.

BRAVE

For you, bravery is a conscious choice, a mindset that allows you to confront your fears head-on, regardless of the situation. You're not naturally fearless; you just choose to confront your dread rather than run from it. Because you've had to develop bravery in yourself over time, you're sometimes able to instill the same in others with the right words and actions.

You gain the following characteristics:

Resolve: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in persuasion.

Suggested Second Skill: Stealth or Might defense.

Suggested Inability: You're brave, but you have to talk yourself into it. You have an inability in initiative.

Stat Pools, page 10

CARING

Helping others is your calling. It's why you're here. Others delight in your outgoing and charitable nature, and you delight in their happiness. You're at your best when you're aiding others, whether by treating their injuries, helping them with a task, or putting the best face on a bad situation for the sake of morale.

You gain the following characteristics:

Helpful: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Healing, page 135

Skill: You're trained in healing.

Suggested Second Skill: Persuasion or psychology.

Suggested Inability: You're a little too much of a people person to dissemble well. You have an inability in deception.

CAUTIOUS

You don't charge into new situations without due consideration. You're afraid of what will happen if you don't carefully study the particulars of a new job, opportunity, or investigation. Those burdened with less vigilance than you might call you timid, but you suspect bravery is just another word for foolhardiness.

You gain the following characteristics:

Cognizant: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in perception.

Suggested Second Skill: Researching or initiative.

Suggested Inability: Sometimes your caution leads to doubt. You have an inability in discerning motive.

CHEERFUL

You're jovial and outgoing. You put others at ease with a smile and a wink, and maybe a joke at your own expense. Lightly ribbing your companions who can take it also spreads cheer (if not overdone). Others accuse you of never taking anything seriously. Untrue; you just prefer to meet each new challenge with a grin.

You gain the following characteristics:

Witty: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in persuasion.

Suggested Second Skill: Performance or healing.

Suggested Inability: You're lighthearted but not fast. You have an inability in Speed defense.

CYNICAL

You can't help but question claims taken for granted by others. You're not necessarily a "doubting Thomas" (a skeptic who refuses to believe anything without direct personal experience), but you've often benefited from questioning the statements, opinions, and received knowledge presented to you by others.

You gain the following characteristics:

Skeptical: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in discerning motive.

Suggested Second Skill: Any scientific area of knowledge such as physics or astronomy.

Suggested Inability: Sometimes you're so absorbed in figuring out what's really going on, you're slow to react. You have an inability in Speed defense.

ENIGMATIC

The dark figure lurking silently in the corner? That's you. No one really knows where you came from or what your motives are—you play things close to the vest. Your manner perplexes and confounds others, but that doesn't make you a poor friend or ally. You're just good at keeping things to yourself.

You gain the following characteristics:

Skill: You're trained in stealth.

Skill: You're trained in Intellect defense.

Suggested Second Skill: Deception or occultism.

Suggested Inability: You have almost as much trouble reading others as they do you. You have an inability in discerning motive.

FASTIDIOUS

You're a stickler for accuracy and detail. You can't stand a mess, whether it's your home or office, or a conceptual mess stemming from a failure to plan. Your stuff is neatly catalogued and perfectly ordered, so you never have to dig around looking for something. Meticulousness, you believe, is never wrong.

You gain the following characteristics:

Careful: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in forensics.

Suggested Second Skill: Researching or identifying.

Suggested Inability: You can't stand disruptions, especially to your concentration. You have an inability in Intellect defense.

FEARLESS

You've heard of the "fight, flight, or freeze" response to danger, but you've never experienced anything other than the urge to fight when facing peril. You're a true thrill-seeker. Sure, your heart begins to thunder when a crisis arises. But you revel in that feeling; for you, the sensation is pure excitement.

You gain the following characteristics:

Dauntless: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in Intellect defense.

Suggested Second Skill: Endurance or initiative.

Suggested Inability: Your fearlessness makes you impatient. You have an inability in stealth.

FEROCIOUS

You try to hide what's inside, fold it into yourself when everything in you screams to let go, make them pay, make them hurt, and make them bleed. Sometimes you succeed at hiding this for the sake of your friends—smiling and laughing when they do, and sometimes honestly so. But your ferocity is always underneath, and when it's bad, you can hardly keep it on a leash.

You gain the following characteristics:

Brutish: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in tracking.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Ferocious characters can choose the following characteristic:

Bloodthirsty: Once you begin fighting, you see only red. The first attack you make in any given combat is eased.

Suggested Inability: You're easily provoked. You have an inability in Intellect defense.

HOPEFUL

You treat setbacks as stepping stones to something better. Your optimism means you're generally happier than others, both in the moment and over the long term because hope helps you bounce back from adversity. You're not blindly hopeful; your faith in a better tomorrow is partially born from your empathy, which grants you a glimpse of others' inner battles.

You gain the following characteristics:

Resilient: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in discerning motive.

Suggested Second Skill: Persuasion or performance.

Suggested Inability: You always hope for the best, even when you should be preparing. You have an inability in researching.

INQUISITIVE

You seek to learn the mysteries, wonders, and occult secrets of the world. Your inquiries are often made by examining what lurks in the archives of organizations dedicated to researching the astonishing, the esoteric, and the weird. Learning something new is its own reward, even when it's sometimes unsettling.

You gain the following characteristics:

Curious: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in researching.

Suggested Second Skill: Any knowledge skill like astronomy, geography, or history.

Suggested Inability: When you see something interesting, you hesitate as you take in all the details. You have an inability in initiative tasks.

INTIMIDATING

You are imposing in manner, stature, or both. People's eyes often grow wide as you enter a room. There's a touch of danger around you, and most people can sense it. It's off-putting and unnerving, but you can use it to your advantage.

You gain the following characteristics:

Threatening: +2 to your Might Pool, or +2 to your Intellect Pool, or +1 to both Pools.

Skill: You're trained in intimidation.

Suggested Second Skill: Gunsmithing or deception.

Suggested Inability: You're threatening but not a quick study. Tasks related to lore and knowledge are hindered.

LIKEABLE

You're charming and charismatic. You've got that "special something" that draws others to you. You often know just the right thing to say to make someone laugh, put them at ease, or spur them to action. People like you, want to help you, and want to be your friend.

You gain the following characteristics:

Charismatic: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in persuasion.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Likeable characters can choose the following characteristic:

Contact: You have an important contact who is in an influential position, such as a minor celebrity, a police captain, or the editor of a news organization. You and the GM should work out the details together.

Suggested Inability: Your willpower is not one of your strong points. You have an inability in Intellect defense.

MUSCULAR

You're strong. You complete physical challenges with ease. You enjoy the feeling of power and endurance that comes with your strength. That, in turn, lends you self-assuredness; you know you have the might to handle nearly everything the world throws at you and, if need be, break it.

You gain the following characteristics:

Strong: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in endurance.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Muscular characters can choose the following characteristic:

Breaking: Your tasks to smash physical objects—doors, containers, and other inanimate objects—are eased.

Suggested Inability: You're strong but not quick. You have an inability in initiative.

NERVOUS

The world is full of unsettling things; you're not just imagining it. Though the constant unease you feel at this realization is sometimes challenging, you've come to appreciate how this nervous energy grants you a certain spring in your step, especially if something you're nervous about makes a sudden appearance. You expected it all along.

You gain the following characteristics:

Jumpy: +2 to your Speed Pool.

Skill: You're trained in initiative.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Nervous characters can choose the following characteristic:

High-Strung: You gain an asset to your initiative tasks if you use your first action in an encounter to move a short distance away from whatever danger threatens you.

Asset, page 119

Suggested Inability: You'll never convincingly make ultimatums. You have an inability in intimidation.

NO-NONSENSE

You hate frills, chitchat, gossip, and anything else that obscures what's important. You prize straight talk and focusing on the facts. You recognize that sometimes your severe manner can hurt other people's feelings. So you moderate it for your friends. But not so much that you compromise your goals with unnecessary distractions.

You gain the following characteristics:

Austere: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in researching.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, No-Nonsense characters can choose the following characteristic:

Resilient: You ignore the first 3 points of Stress you would otherwise take in a day from shock, such as Stress gained by experiencing something supernatural. Once this threshold is surpassed, you suffer Stress normally until after your next ten-hour recovery roll, which resets the threshold.

Recovery rolls, page 136

Suggested Inability: People react negatively to your humorless ways. You have an inability in persuasion.

OBSESSIVE

Unlike other descriptors, Quick, Smart, and Sturdy offer no initial skill, but rather a larger stat Pool bonus.

Some formative experience in your life drives you. Maybe you lost a loved one and need to find out why or what happened to them. Maybe you were judged wanting in the past and need to prove yourself. Whatever drives you, you don't let misfortune and setbacks prevent you from continuing to pursue your goal.

You gain the following characteristics:

Dogged: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in identifying.

Suggested Second Skill: Any craft-related skill such as carpentry, cooking, leatherworking, metalworking, or sewing.

Suggested Inability: Sometimes you come across as so single-minded that you put people off. You have an inability in persuasion.

PRETENTIOUS

You're confident you know the best way to handle whatever situation arises. You try not to be rude or dismissive, but sometimes you marvel at others' shortcomings, whether in their skill or in a belief they hold that you deem ridiculous. Few can talk you into anything or change your mind when you don't want it changed.

You gain the following characteristics:

Willful: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in Intellect defense rolls.

Suggested Second Skill: Any technical expertise skill like programming, publishing, or researching.

Suggested Inability: Pomposity doesn't lend itself to likeability. You have an inability in persuasion.

QUICK

You're in the right place at the right time, or even more often, you avoid the wrong place at the wrong time. You're no stranger to unfortunate events, but you're swift enough that you haven't sustained lasting harm. Some say you're lucky, but you know it's all down to your ability to get out of the way of bad things.

You gain the following characteristics:

Swift: +4 to your Speed Pool.

Suggested Skill: Endurance or gymnastics.

Suggested Inability: You're quick but not quick-witted when it comes to falsehoods. You have an inability in deception.

RUTHLESS

You're effective at what you do, partly because you harden your heart to the misfortunes and suffering of others that might otherwise distract you from your goal. You understand the ends justify the means if the issue at hand is large enough. What others call cruelty, you call unflinching pragmatism.

You gain the following characteristics:

Hard: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in deception.

Suggested Second Skill: Intimidation or stealth.

Suggested Inability: You have a hard time connecting with others, understanding their motives, or sharing their feelings. You have an inability in discerning motive.

SCHOLARLY

You studied, either on your own or with an instructor. You know many things and are an expert on a couple of them, such as history, geography, occultism, nature, or any other area of study. Scholarly characters typically carry a few books around with them and spend their spare time reading.

You gain the following characteristics:

Skill: You're trained in one knowledge skill like philosophy, geography, or history.

Skill: You're trained in another knowledge skill like astronomy, biology, or geology, as long as it's different than the other knowledge skill you gain from this descriptor.

Suggested Second Skill: Identifying or researching.

Suggested Inability: You spend too much time in your scholarly pursuits to trust your empathy. You have an inability in discerning motive.

SMART

You're quite smart. Your memory is sharp, and you easily grasp concepts that others might struggle with. This aptitude doesn't necessarily mean that you've had years of formal education; you pick things up quickly and retain a lot of it over your lifetime.

You gain the following characteristics:

Brainy: +4 to your Intellect Pool.

Suggested Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Smart characters can choose the following characteristic:

Eidetic: You remember and can memorize things you experience directly. For example, instead of being good at recalling details of geography that you read about in a book, you can remember a path through a set of tunnels that you've explored before. If a roll is required to test your memory against something particularly challenging, your roll is eased.

Suggested Inability: You're good at absorbing information, but not at hiding what you know. You have an inability in deception.

STURDY

You're tough and can take a lot of physical punishment. It's not that you don't feel pain—you just don't let it affect you. Being resilient and unyielding in the face of adversity means you can endure hardships that compel people less sturdy than you to give up.

You gain the following characteristics:

Rugged: +4 to your Might Pool.

Suggested Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Sturdy characters can choose the following characteristic:

Resilient: You ignore the first 3 points of Stress you would otherwise take in a day from physical sources, such as Stress gained through minor wounds. Once this threshold is surpassed, you suffer Stress normally until after your next ten-hour recovery roll, which resets the threshold.

Inability: You're brawny but not mentally flexible. You have an inability in Intellect defense.

Unlike other descriptors, Scholarly offers no initial stat Pool bonus, but instead another skill.

SUPERSTITIOUS

You're attuned to the subtle energies and connections that run through the world. You see patterns others overlook. Even if those patterns ultimately lead nowhere, your sense of wonder allows you to experience magic in everyday life. If you apply yourself, you're certain that the deepest truths that have so far eluded you will finally come into focus.

You gain the following characteristics:

Folkwise: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in occultism.

Suggested Second Skill: Instead of an extra skill, Superstitious characters can choose the following characteristic:

Throw Salt: When something that is unquestionably supernatural potentially affects you in an adverse way, you can reroll your defense roll against it. You can do this once in any given encounter.

Suggested Inability: You're willing to believe a lot. You have an inability in discerning motive.

SUSPICIOUS

You understand that the world isn't always a safe place, nor made up entirely of people who have your best interests at heart. Sure, lots of people are completely harmless, and some are actually benevolent. It's the few bad apples you're on the lookout for. Being vigilant offers you a sense of security and informs your decision-making for the better.

You gain the following characteristics:

Guarded: +2 to your Might Pool.

Skill: You're trained in discerning motive.

Suggested Second Skill: Initiative or perception.

Suggested Inability: Sometimes you're too suspicious and put people off. You have an inability in persuasion.

TECH-SAVVY

You've always loved playing around with devices, especially computers and smartphones. The long hours you've spent tinkering, coding, or designing circuits means you can pick up a new device and use it like a pro in no time or, if need be, crack it open and find out what secrets it hides.

You gain the following characteristics:

Technical: +2 to your Intellect Pool.

Skill: You're trained in programming or electronics.

Suggested Second Skill: Any other technical skill, like electrical repair or engineering.

Suggested Inability: You're better with tech than with people. You have an inability in discerning motive.

CHAPTER 3

CHARACTER TYPE

> I took my hand, and I reached down into the darkness. Down and down, until my whole arm was inside, up to the shoulder. It was damp and cold, with the rough stone sides scraping my skin, but my hand was stretched as far as I could, and it still gripped nothing but empty air. Then the hole began to close, and all at once the spell was broken. I tried to pull my arm out, to get free, but it held me tight. Not quite crushing me, but holding me in place. I screamed and cried for help, looking around for anyone who might be able to hear me, but the only people walking by seemed utterly oblivious to what was happening. Then I felt it, something brushing against my hand from below it in the hole. Teeth. Wet, blunt teeth, which quickly gave way to a rough, slender tongue that wrapped itself around my hand and snaked up my arm, as though tasting me.
>
> —MAG 97: "We All Ignore the Pit"

Character type is the core of your character. Your type helps determine your character's place in the world and relationship with other people in the setting. It's the noun of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

You can choose from four character types: Investigator, Protector, Elocutionist, and Occultist. The type you choose can help define and describe your role in the group, and thus your role in the story.

Your type determines your starting stat Pool totals, grants you new abilities at each tier, and determines how many cyphers you have access to.

SUPERNATURAL TYPE ABILITIES

Those individuals who have come into direct contact with the supernatural sometimes have strange abilities to show for the experience. Essentially, players should keep note of how many of their Stress levels come from supernatural sources (through either witnessing them or suffering damage from them). If a character reaches a total of 10 such levels, they have been "touched" by the Entities enough that they can take on a supernatural aspect to themselves. Whether one considers this a curse or a blessing is up to the individual.

Using Stress, page 129

Characters who qualify can select abilities marked with 👁. In most cases, these are available at third tier and above, although some Occultists can gain access earlier.

INVESTIGATOR

> Amherst is rapidly becoming one of an uncomfortably long list of names that I dread seeing in a statement. Could this be an ancestor of John Amherst? Or, given the many apparent deaths of the soldier in the book, might it be the same being, well over a hundred years old? If so, I wonder how many times it has died of sickness and disease.
>
> —MAG 68: "The Tale of a Field Hospital"

In many games, the Investigator might be a side or minor character. But in The Magnus Archives, they are prominent. If the group is going to have multiple players with the same type, it makes sense that they would be Investigators.

The darkness can be overwhelming. You bring the light into the shadows and expose the truth. There may be secrets humans weren't meant to know, but you've never found one. To you, it's always better to know.

Sometimes the work can be tedious. You haunt libraries and records offices more than spooky houses or cemeteries. When you need to, though, you're good at slipping in where you're not supposed to be to learn a secret or discover a clue.

Individual Role: Investigators are smart, perceptive people. They're more likely to overcome a challenge using their wits than by other means, and occasionally their curiosity or persistence can get them into trouble.

Group Role: Investigators serve as the core of the team, as "investigating" is so much of what PCs do in The Magnus Archives. As previously mentioned, though, they can get into trouble and sometimes need someone to protect them or help them talk their way out of a bad situation. When it comes to solving mysteries or delving into a topic, they lead the way.

Weapons and The Magnus Archives, page 101

Societal Role: Investigators can also be called researchers. They can serve as private investigators, insurance investigators, researchers in a university setting, or even librarians. Mostly, though, in the context of The Magnus Archives, they are archivists or assistant archivists, checking on details found in the statements about the paranormal that people provide.

Advanced Investigators: As Investigators advance, their skills get better and better, and they grow more adept at finding and—perhaps even more important—assembling clues to make sense of what would otherwise remain a mystery.

Supernatural Investigators: Investigators who gain paranormal abilities can use their powers to acquire information impossible to gain otherwise by reaching out in dreams, clairvoyance, or seeing into the past or the future. Such abilities are marked with 👁.

INVESTIGATOR STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	10
Speed	9
Intellect	9

The player has 6 additional points to assign to the stat Pools as they wish.

FIRST-TIER INVESTIGATOR

First-tier Investigators have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Fit: You have a Speed Edge of 1, a Might Edge of 0, and an Intellect Edge of 1.

Investigative Skills: You are trained in two investigation-related skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: discerning motive, forensics, intimidation, perception, persuasion, researching, or tracking. Enabler.

Cypher Use: You can have two cyphers at a time.

Weapons: You're practiced with light and medium weapons and suffer no penalty when using them. You have an inability when using heavy weapons. Enabler.

Investigative Abilities: Compared to most others, you're clear-headed, quick-witted, and perceptive, and your abilities reflect that. Choose two of the abilities listed below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

Careful Observation (1 Intellect point): You take a minute to examine your surroundings. If you succeed at a difficulty 4 perception task, you take note of an inanimate object within an immediate distance that is related to your current investigation. You see a particular color of mud on some boots, a loose thread in a coat on a hook, the disturbance of dust on a bookshelf that reveals the most recently examined book, or some other detail that another person would have likely passed over. If there is no such detail in the area, you learn that too (and know that you can move on, as there's nothing of note there). If there are two or more such details, you still just make one roll; you learn one detail if you succeed at a difficulty 4 task, a second detail if you succeed at a difficulty 5 task, the third detail if you succeed at a difficulty 6 task, and so forth. Action.

Decipher (1 Intellect point): If you spend one minute examining a piece of writing or code in a language you don't understand, you can make an Intellect roll to get the gist of the message. The difficulty is usually 3 but may be higher based on the complexity of the language or code. Action to initiate; one minute to complete.

Fleet of Foot (1+ Speed points): Instead of being able to move an immediate distance as part of another action, you can move a short distance as part of another action. Instead of moving a short distance as your entire action for a turn, you can move a long distance. If you apply a level of Effort to this ability, you can move a long distance and make an attack as your entire action for a turn, but the attack is hindered. Enabler.

Follow the Trail: When you apply Effort to a perception or tracking task because you are attempting to find a specific person or place, you can apply a free level of Effort. Enabler.

Knowledge Skills: You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two areas of knowledge such as history, geography, forensics, and so on. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

Missing Detail (2 Intellect points): You listen to the words of an NPC, read a transcript of something that was said, or read an account written by someone—such as a statement—and you immediately note something that *wasn't* said. This can be something implied by what was said or written, or something obviously left out. The GM provides this brief fact to you. The words written or spoken must be substantial, like someone giving an eyewitness account, telling a story, or—as previously mentioned—giving a statement. Enabler.

Missing Detail isn't meant to force GMs to come up with new information, but rather to allow them to reveal a hint that will be helpful in the investigation. GMs can give the hint, and then—if desired—the player and GM can work together to come up with the actual missing detail.

EXAMPLE MISSING DETAILS

- The dates of the three appearances by a strange creature suggest that it only comes out at night, when the moon is waxing.
- The person telling the story never mentioned locking the door, so the intruder could have come in that way.
- The statement giver claims that they had never met the strange man before, yet later they know his name without being told.
- There's a voice in the background of the recording, but supposedly the house was empty.

Operate in the Dark (1 Intellect point): For the next hour, you use your other senses to compensate for a lack of vision. If you're blinded or just in the dark, you operate without any hindrance. Action to initiate.

Ready for Danger: You are trained in initiative. Enabler.

Surging Confidence (1 Might point): You can use your one-action recovery roll as part of another action. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER INVESTIGATOR

Choose two of the investigative abilities listed here (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. In addition, you can replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Escape (2 Speed points): You slip your restraints, squeeze through the bars, break the grip of the creature holding you, pull free from sucking quicksand, or otherwise get loose from whatever is holding you in place. Action.

Eye for Detail (2 Intellect points): When you spend at least five minutes thoroughly exploring an area no larger than a short distance in diameter, you can ask the GM one question about the area and get an answer. You cannot use this more than one time per area per 24 hours. Action to initiate; five minutes to complete.

Hand to Eye (2 Speed points): This ability provides an asset to any tasks involving manual dexterity, such as pickpocketing, lockpicking, games involving agility, and so on, for one minute. Action to initiate.

Just a Hunch (2 Intellect points): A flash of insight provides you with a small clue or suggests a course of action with regard to an urgent question, problem, or obstacle you're facing when you have no idea how to proceed. Once you use this ability, you can't use it again until after your next ten-hour recovery roll, and then only if you've followed up on the clue or course of action suggested by your last hunch. Action.

Just a Hunch is there for the GM to give a hint to the player when they're stuck and don't know what to do.

Research (2 Intellect points): If you spend at least two hours with an appropriate source of information (such as the internet, a library, the archives, or a single informative book), you learn one relevant fact about a topic you choose. Essentially, you ask the GM a question and they give you an answer appropriate for the topic based on the source. The internet or a small-town library might not have accurate esoteric occult information, while a book on ancient architecture might have everything you need on that topic. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

Skim (2 Intellect points): Taking just a minute, you can skim through a book, a computer database, a diary, an accounting ledger, or a similar information source and get the gist of the contents. If you succeed at a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task, you also learn a prominent or surprising bit of information you didn't already know. Action to initiate; one minute to complete.

Surveillance: All tasks involving monitoring, watching, or tailing a person or place are eased. This includes setting up cameras, microphones, or other equipment. Enabler.

Travel Skills: You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: driving, endurance, geography, piloting, or riding. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER INVESTIGATOR

Third-tier Investigators have the following abilities:

Expert Cypher Use: You can have three cyphers at a time.

Investigative Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Interaction Skills: You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: deception, discerning motive, intimidation, or persuasion. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

Quick Recovery: Your ten-minute recovery roll is only a single action. Enabler.

Scarred and Hardened: You reduce the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 1. You still suffer Stress from mental shock or despair normally. Enabler.

Seen Some . . . Stuff: You reduce the Stress you suffer from mental shock or despair by 1. You still suffer Stress from physical injury normally. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Think Your Way Out: You can use points from your Intellect Pool rather than your Might Pool or Speed Pool on any noncombat action. Enabler.

Trapfinder (3+ Intellect points): You find any traps (like a floor that would give way beneath you) or mechanical triggers to a trap or defense system that might pose a threat. You can do this without setting them off and in lieu of making a roll to find them. This ability automatically finds traps of level 4 or below. You can use Effort to increase the level of traps that can be found by 2, so using two levels of Effort can find all traps of level 8 and below. Action.

Unnatural Dream (3 Intellect points and 3 Stress): When you fall asleep, you have a dream that provides insight into a situation you currently face (although you do not consciously choose the topic). The GM provides you with the information you learn, probably details you couldn't learn conventionally. Action.

FOURTH-TIER INVESTIGATOR

Choose two of the investigative abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Credible Hypothesis (4 Intellect points): You examine an immediate area (basically an average room) and learn precise, useful details about the past (if any exist). You can ask the GM up to four questions about the immediate area; each requires its own roll (the GM determines the difficulty, but the default is level 4). Action.

Heightened Skills: You are trained in two tasks of your choosing (other than attacks or defense). If you choose a task you're already trained in, you instead become specialized in that task. You can't choose a task you're already specialized in. Enabler.

Look for the Tell (4 Intellect points): After spending at least a minute with a person in conversation, for the next minute you know when they are lying. Action to initiate.

Perfect Tracker: If you find a set of tracks, you can follow them without error unless the conditions absolutely prohibit it (heavy rain, complete darkness, etc.). Enabler.

Subtle Steps: When you move no more than a short distance, you can move without making a sound, regardless of the surface you move across. Enabler.

Take Their Measure (3 Intellect points): You learn the level of all creatures you can see. If they have any special weaknesses (such as a vulnerability to fire), you learn what those are. Action.

Versatile Mind: When you make a Speed defense roll, you can use points from your Intellect Pool instead of your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Supernatural Senses (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You have an uncanny intuition when it comes to finding things. While exploring, you can extend your senses up to 1 mile (1.6 km) in any direction and ask the GM a very simple, general question—usually a yes-or-no question—about that area, such as "Is there a library nearby?" or "Are there any bodies buried in that yard?" If the answer you seek is not in the area, you receive no information. Action.

FIFTH-TIER INVESTIGATOR

Fifth-tier Investigators have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can bear four cyphers at a time.

Investigative Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Hard to Kill: You can reroll any defense task you make but never more than once per round. Enabler.

Mastery With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You become specialized in defense tasks of that type. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

Seize the Moment (4+ Speed points): If you succeed on a Speed defense roll to resist an attack, you gain an action. You can use the action immediately even if you have already taken a turn in the round. You don't take an action during the next round, unless you apply a level of Effort when you use Seize the Moment. Enabler.

Shrug It Off: You ignore the negative effects of your first Stress level. Enabler.

Vigilant (5 Might points): When affected by an attack or effect that would daze or stun you, or anything that would specifically make you lose your next action, you are not affected. Enabler.

See the Past (5 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You touch an object, read the subtle echoes of its existence through time, ask the GM a question about the object's past, and get a general answer. The answers are often in the form of brief images or sensations rather than specific answers in a language you know. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. After you use this ability, you have an asset on identifying the object. Action.

"Obscure" is a relative term. A historian might not know how a collector acquired a specific artefact, but someone using See the Past on that artefact would have an easy time sensing that event.

SIXTH-TIER INVESTIGATOR

Choose two of the investigative abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Advanced Research (6 Intellect points): Through luck, a hunch, or just general preparedness, you already researched the topic that now faces you, providing you with information and answers as if you took a full week with an appropriate source of information to learn what you could. Action.

General Knowledge: All tasks involving knowledge, research, observation, or assessment are eased. Enabler.

Impossible Clue (6 Intellect points): You focus for one action on an immediate area or a single individual, after which you learn (no roll needed) a fact about that area or person that you seemingly couldn't possibly know. Like Sherlock Holmes, you notice a detail no one else would and come to a conclusion that is always correct. The GM provides the fact (the conclusion) and then you and the GM can work together to come up with the clue. Alternatively, you can skip coming up with the specifics of the clue and just focus on the information gained. Action.

A few examples of facts that might be learned (and the clue that might reveal them):

- There was someone in the room at 6:30 a.m. (There are a few raindrops on the window sill even though the window is closed, indicating that someone closed it after it started raining, but before it started truly pouring.)
- The owner of the house hates children. (Other houses and yards in the neighborhood show signs that kids play there, but not this one.)

- The man has been divorced twice. (His ring finger bears the marks of two different rings, but he wears no ring now.)
- The woman is allergic to flowers. (A child in the lobby of the building is giving out daisies to all the ladies passing through, but she doesn't have one.)

Mastery With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are specialized in attacks using that type of weapon. Enabler. (If you aren't trained in an attack, select Skill With Attacks to become trained in that attack.)

See the Future (6 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Based on all the variables you perceive, you can predict the next few minutes. This has the following effects:

- For the next ten minutes, your defense rolls gain an asset.
- You have a sort of danger sense. For the next ten minutes, you gain an asset in seeing through deceptions and attempts to betray you, as well as avoiding traps and ambushes.
- You know what people are probably thinking and what they will say before they say it. For the next ten minutes, you gain an asset to tasks involving interaction and deception.

Enabler.

INVESTIGATOR EXAMPLE

Isla decides to create an Investigator character, someone who began her career as an aspiring journalist who prides herself on getting the real story. She puts 2 additional points into her Speed Pool and 4 into her Intellect Pool; her stat Pools are now Might 10, Speed 11, and Intellect 13. As a first-tier character, her Effort is 1, her Might Edge is 0, and her Speed Edge and Intellect Edge are 1. Isla's character is fairly well-rounded so far.

Isla then chooses two investigative skills and settles on forensics and researching, which seem like great options for figuring out how weird a particular area of interest might be.

She can also pick up a couple of type abilities for her character. She selects Careful Observation and Decipher, figuring that the first is vital for getting a clear sense of what's going on during her investigations, and the second is ideal in case things become dangerous and she needs to act decisively.

Isla's Investigator can bear two cyphers. The GM decides that one is strange music that allows her to rid herself of a few points of Stress, and the other is a curiosity that increases her Intellect Edge for an hour.

Next, her character needs a descriptor. After looking over the options, she selects Scholarly, thinking that explains her training and still speaks to who her character has become. Scholarly grants her training in two knowledge skills; she chooses history and psychology. She also opts for a second—or, in her case, third—descriptor skill, and selects identifying. Opting for an additional skill means also choosing an inability, so she goes with the suggested one: discerning motive.

For her focus, Isla chooses Explores Dark Places (which for her are likely to be abandoned homes, basements, old farmhouses, and weird tunnels underground). This gives her three additional skills: perception, endurance, and gymnastics.

For her character arc, Isla chooses Assist an Organization. She figures her research fits hand in glove with the group she's part of, which seeks to document supernatural events.

Forensics, page 17

Researching, page 18

Skill With Attacks, page 32

Careful Observation, page 29

Decipher, page 29

Strange music, page 112

Curiosity, page 108

Descriptors, page 19

Scholarly, page 25

History, page 17

Psychology, page 18

Identifying, page 17

Discerning motive, page 16

Explores Dark Places, page 63

Perception, page 17

Endurance, page 17

Gymnastics, page 17

Character Arcs, page 141

Assist an Organization, page 145

PROTECTOR

> I screamed. Why not? I'd already established no one was around to hear me. He immediately released my hand and apologized, said he'd only been trying to protect me. I asked him from what and he gestured to the burned man, still lying motionless in his bed, chanting his nonsense phrases. Sparing a glance at his own wrapped form, he said that touching the man would have been a "bad idea." He seemed to be in tremendous pain as he spoke, but did his best to hide it.
>
> —MAG 12: "First Aid"

The world is full of danger. More than most people even know. Someone's got to shine a light on the darkness, but someone else needs to have that person's back. You're the Protector.

Individual Role: Protectors are physical, action-oriented people. They're more likely to overcome a challenge using force than by other means, and they often take the most straightforward path toward their goals.

Group Role: Protectors usually take and deal the most punishment in a dangerous situation. Often it falls on them to protect the other group members from threats. This sometimes means that Protectors take on leadership roles as well, at least in combat and other times of danger.

Societal Role: Protectors in the world may be (or have been) soldiers, mercenaries, guards, watchmen, police officers, sailors, or people in other roles or professions who know how to defend themselves with skill.

Advanced Protectors: As Protectors advance, their skill in battle—whether defending themselves or dishing out damage—increases to impressive levels. At higher tiers, they can often take on groups of foes by themselves or stand toe to toe with anyone.

Supernatural Protectors: Protectors who gain paranormal abilities can use their powers to enhance their combat skills or affect supernatural foes in ways that a normal person could not. Such abilities are marked with 👁.

PROTECTOR STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	10
Speed	10
Intellect	8

The player has 6 additional points to assign to the stat Pools as they wish.

FIRST-TIER PROTECTOR

First-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Fit: You have a Might Edge of 1, a Speed Edge of 1, and an Intellect Edge of 0.

Protector Knowledge: You are trained in one noncombat Protector-related area of knowledge in which you are not already trained. Choose one of the following: discerning motive, forensics, intimidation, perception, stealth, or tracking. Enabler.

Cypher Use: You can have two cyphers at a time.

Weapons: You're practiced with light, medium, and heavy weapons and suffer no penalty when using any kind of weapon. Enabler.

Protective Abilities: You're a physical person, and no stranger to a fight. Your main aim is to use these abilities to protect your friends and allies. Some of your abilities are constant, providing ongoing effects, and others are specific actions that usually cost points from one of your stat Pools.

Choose two of the abilities described below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

Combat Prowess: You add 1 additional point of damage to one type of attack of your choice: melee attacks or ranged attacks. You can choose this up to two times, once for melee and once for ranged. Enabler.

No Need for Weapons: When you make an unarmed attack (such as a punch or kick), you deal 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

One Against Many (1+ Speed points): Sometimes you've got to deal with a group of enemies, or even a swarm of enemies (rats, spiders, or worse). When this happens, perhaps the best you can do by yourself is control where everyone in the fight can or cannot go. You attempt an attack against the highest-level enemy, and if successful, in lieu of inflicting damage, you affect all the foes within an immediate distance in one of two ways: either they must move within an immediate area as you direct, or they are prevented from moving into a space in immediate range that you choose. You can use the latter option to keep them away from allies (as long as the allies don't move), but you can't keep them away from you in this way.

The foes affected must be level 1, although you can spend additional points from your Speed Pool to affect higher levels, with each point increasing the affected creature level by 1. You must always affect the highest-level foe, so if you face a level 3 cultist and his thirty level 1 rats, you must spend 3 Speed points. Action.

Other Knowledge: You aren't just a brute—you have other areas of interest as well. You are trained in one non-physical skill of your choosing in which you don't already have training. Enabler.

Overwatch (1 Intellect point): You use a ranged weapon to target a limited area (such as a doorway, a hallway, or the eastern side of a clearing) and make an attack against the next viable target to enter that area, acting just before they act. You also negate any benefit the target would have from cover, position, range, or visibility. Further, you inflict 1 additional point of damage with the attack. You can remain on overwatch as long as you wish, within reason. Action.

Physical Skills: You are trained in endurance or gymnastics. If you are already trained in one or both, this does not improve them. Enabler.

Protector: You designate a single character to be your charge. You can change this freely every round, but you can have only one charge at a time. As long as that charge is within immediate range, they gain an asset for Speed defense tasks because you have their back. Enabler.

Slow Them Down (1 Might or 1 Speed point): This is a pummeling melee attack or a covering-fire ranged attack. Your attack inflicts 1 less point of damage than normal, but it dazes your target for one round, during which time their tasks are hindered and they move only half as fast as normal. Action.

Take the Hit (2 Might points): If someone you are close enough to touch is struck and will suffer damage, you can take the hit instead. The other person suffers no damage, and you gain 3 points of Stress regardless of the damage that would have been originally dealt.

SECOND-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the protective abilities described below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Bodyguard: If you're standing next to an ally, that ally's initiative tasks are eased. Enabler.

Coping With the Impossible (2 Intellect points): When faced with something supernatural and difficult (or impossible) to harm by any normal means, you improvise a way to use the environment or the situation to cause the target to lose its next turn if you succeed at an Intellect-based task. Once you affect a target with this ability, further attempts to use this ability on the same target are hindered. Action.

Intimidating Demeanor: You gain an asset when attempting to intimidate someone that can see you while you display a threat of violence. Enabler.

Quick Recovery: Your ten-minute recovery roll is only a single action. Enabler.

Scarred and Hardened: You reduce the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 1. You still suffer Stress from mental shock or despair normally. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

Stand Watch (2 Might points): While standing watch (mostly remaining in place for an extended period of time), you unfailingly remain awake and alert for up to eight hours. During this time, you are trained in perception tasks as well as stealth tasks to conceal yourself from those who might approach. Action to initiate.

Support the Team (2 Might points): While you stand watch and take no other actions, allies within a short distance gain an asset to their perception tasks, as they know you've got their backs. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER PROTECTOR

Third-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Expert Cypher Use: You can have three cyphers at a time.

Protective Abilities: Choose two of the abilities described below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Combat Medic: You are trained in healing. Further, if a person has moved to the dead step of the damage track and you can reach them within one round, you can use your action to keep them from dying. They remain debilitated and are most likely unconscious. They will need more formal medical attention (such as in a lengthy hospital stay) to recover. Action.

Deadly Aim (3 Speed points): For the next minute, all ranged attacks you make inflict 2 additional points of damage. Action to initiate.

Lunge (2 Might points): You extend yourself for a powerful stab or smash. The awkward lunge hinders the attack roll. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

Reaction: If a creature you attacked on your last turn with a melee attack uses its action to move out of immediate range, you gain an action to attack the creature as a parting blow, even if you have already taken a turn in the round. Enabler.

Seen Some . . . Stuff: You reduce the Stress you suffer from mental shock or despair by 1. You still suffer Stress from physical injury normally. Enabler.

Spray (2 Speed points): If a weapon has the ability to fire rapid shots without reloading (usually called a rapid-fire weapon, such as a submachine gun), you can spray multiple shots around your target to increase the chance of hitting. This ability uses 1d6 + 1 rounds of ammo (or all the ammo in the weapon, if it has less than the number rolled). If the attack is successful, it deals 1 less point of damage than normal. You can also use this ability on multiple thrown weapons (stones, shuriken, daggers, and so on) if you're carrying them on your person or they are all within reach. Action.

Tactical Plan (3 Intellect points): You put in the time to develop a strategy for an upcoming trip to a location you can study records and/or anecdotes about. If you visit afterward, you and up to five allies who accompany you—to whom you explain your plan—gain three of the following benefits (your choice) for that particular visit:

- Ease their first initiative roll during the visit
- Ignore the first point of Stress that would otherwise be gained during the visit
- Ease their first perception roll made during the visit
- Ease their first interaction roll made during the visit
- Ease their first defense roll made during the visit
- Ease any task to flee and/or escape the location

Action to initiate; one hour to devise plan.

Tough: You can take punishment beyond what others can. You gain an additional step in your damage track between hale and impaired called hurt. Other than being one step closer to impaired, hurt imposes no changes to your character. Basically, you're sore and bruised, but it's nothing serious. Walk it off. Enabler.

Damage track, page 132

Vigilance (2 Intellect points): You take a cautious approach to combat, focusing more on protecting yourself than on hurting your opponents. While this ability is active, you gain an asset on Speed defense rolls, and your attacks are hindered. This effect lasts for as long as you wish, but it ends if no combat is taking place within range of your senses. Action to initiate.

Impossible Strength (3 Might points and 3 Stress): For the next minute, you possess inhuman strength. You gain an asset on any noncombat action requiring physical strength, and +2 to your Might Edge. You could lift a small car. You could toss a full file cabinet across the room. In melee combat, you inflict 4 additional points of damage. Action to initiate.

FOURTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the protective abilities described below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless the description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Amazing Effort: Choose either Might Effort or Speed Effort. When you apply at least one level of that kind of Effort to a noncombat task, you get a free level of Effort on that task. Enabler.

Bury the Bodies: You gain an asset to any action involved in covering up a crime scene, a scene of violence, a break-in, or something similar. This includes speaking with the authorities. Enabler.

Capable Fighter: Your attacks deal 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

Expert Bodyguard: Once per turn, choose one ally that's next to you; their defense tasks are eased. Enabler.

Free From Danger (4 Might points): If you do nothing else as your action, you can grab up to two allies (conscious or otherwise, and even if they are held fast by something) and move them a short distance. For the remainder of that round, you and they have an asset on defense rolls. Action.

Momentum: If you use an action to move, your next attack made using a melee weapon before the end of the next round inflicts 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

Size Them Up (3 Intellect points): You use an action to study a creature you can see. For the next 24 hours, all your attacks against them, and your defense rolls against their attacks, are eased. Action to study.

Snipe (2 Speed points): If you spend one action aiming, in the next round you can make a precise ranged attack. You have an asset on this attack. If your attack is successful, it inflicts 4 additional points of damage. Action.

Touch the Untouchable (4 Might points and 3 Stress): For one minute, you can physically interact with something that normally could not be interacted with normally or safely, like an intangible ghost or liquid magma. Action to initiate.

FIFTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Fifth-tier Protectors have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can bear four cyphers at a time.

Protective Abilities: Choose two of the abilities described below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless the description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Arc Spray (3 Speed points): If a weapon has the ability to fire rapid shots without reloading (usually called a rapid-fire weapon, such as a submachine gun), you can fire your weapon at up to three adjacent targets at once. Make a separate hindered attack roll against each target. Action.

Got Your Back (4 Speed points): You're constantly giving your friends a quick helping hand. If an ally within immediate distance of you fails at a physical task, including an attack or defense roll, you can immediately allow that player to reroll. If the second roll also fails, you gain 1 point of Stress. Enabler.

Improved Success: When you roll a 17 or higher on an attack roll that deals damage, you deal 1 additional point of damage. For instance, if you roll a natural 18, which normally deals 2 extra points of damage, you instead deal 3 extra points. If you roll a natural 20 and choose to deal damage rather than achieve a special major effect, you deal 5 extra points of damage rather than 4. Enabler.

Major effect, page 119

Mastery With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are specialized in attacks using that type of weapon. Enabler. (If you aren't trained in an attack, select Skill With Attacks to become trained in that attack.)

Mastery With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are specialized in defense tasks of that type. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

Parry (5 Speed points): You can deflect incoming attacks quickly. When you activate this ability, for the next ten rounds you ease all Speed defense rolls. Enabler.

Shrug It Off: You ignore the negative effects of your first Stress level. Enabler.

Savagery (5 Might points and 3 Stress): You call upon some of the most visceral, primal fears and draw power to change into a savage, inhuman beast for an hour. In this new form, you gain +8 to your Might Pool, +2 to your Might Edge, +4 to your Speed Pool, and +2 to your Speed Edge. While in beast form, you can't spend Intellect points for any reason other than to try to change to your normal form before the one-hour duration is over (a difficulty 2 task). In addition, you attack any and every living creature within short range. After you revert to your normal form, you take a –1 penalty to all rolls for one hour. If you did not kill and eat at least one substantial creature while in beast form, the penalty increases to –2 and affects all your rolls for the next 24 hours. Eating an intelligent creature gives you 3 points of Stress. Action to change or change back.

SIXTH-TIER PROTECTOR

Choose two of the protective abilities described below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless the description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Again and Again (8 Speed points): You can take an additional action in a round in which you have already acted. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks, page 38

Beacon of Hope: If you make a successful attack roll, you can choose one ally within a short distance that can see you. They are inspired by your success and their next task is eased. Enabler.

Fight On: You do not suffer the normal penalties for being impaired on the damage track. If debilitated, instead of suffering the normal penalty of being unable to take most actions, you can continue to act; however, all tasks are hindered. Enabler.

Damage track, page 132

Finishing Blow (5 Might points): If your foe is prone, stunned, or somehow helpless or incapacitated when you strike, you inflict 7 additional points of damage on a successful hit. Enabler.

Spin Attack (5+ Speed points): You stand still and make attacks against up to five foes, all as part of the same action in one round. All of the attacks have to be the same sort of attack (melee or ranged). Make a separate attack roll for each foe. You remain limited by the amount of Effort you can apply on one action. Anything that modifies your attack or damage applies to all of these attacks. In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can use Effort to increase the number of foes you can attack with this ability (one additional foe per level of Effort used in this way). Action.

Self-Sacrifice (6 Might points and 5 Stress): You take no action other than to stand and defend for one round. During this round, all foes within long range will choose to attack you rather than your allies, drawn to you irresistibly (no roll needed). During this round, you ignore minor injuries (Stress, other than the cost of this ability) and you ignore the first serious injury (damage track move) you suffer. Action.

PROTECTOR EXAMPLE

Oliver decides to create a Protector character so that his friends have a better chance of surviving what lies ahead. He decides he's freshly retired from the military after a few campaigns abroad. He puts 3 of his additional points into his Might Pool and 3 into his Speed Pool; his stat Pools are now Might 13, Speed 13, and Intellect 8. As a first-tier character, his Effort is 1, his Might Edge and Speed Edge are 1, and his Intellect Edge is 0. His character is not particularly smart or charismatic, but he is faster and stronger than average.

For weapons, he equips his character with a machete (a medium weapon) that inflicts 4 points of damage and a medium pistol that inflicts 4 points of damage within long range.

Oliver has Protector Knowledge, which grants a noncombat skill; he goes for tracking so he can follow those who run away instead of telling him what he wants to know.

For his next type ability, Oliver chooses Combat Prowess, so he deals 1 additional point of damage with his machete (and other melee attacks). He also selects One Against Many to leverage his protection against several foes at once.

A first-tier Protector can have two cyphers. The GM decides that Oliver's first cypher is a hard shoulder that allows him to avoid an attack, and his second is a flee The Hunt! that allows him to get out of a dangerous situation quickly.

Oliver considers his descriptor next, choosing Quick, which increases his Speed Pool to 17. A big Speed Pool provides more opportunity for him to use Effort to aim at foes when throwing a knife or evade attacks made by others. He also opts for a second—or, in his case, first—descriptor skill and takes perception (rather than the suggested skill of endurance or gymnastics). Opting for an additional skill also means choosing an inability, and this time he goes with the suggested one: deception.

For his focus, Oliver chooses Works the Back Alleys. This gives him a choice of two skills. He chooses lockpicking and stealth, which seem like great options for getting into and out of a place, even one that's secured, and without drawing too much attention. Oliver's character is a serious combatant, but he is also good at avoiding a fight by staying out of sight, and at helping his allies get into places they're interested in searching.

For his character arc, Oliver chooses Defeat a Foe. That foe, he decides, is someone from his old military company who was once a friend but went rogue after encountering something "unusual."

Tracking, page 18

Combat Prowess, page 37

One Against Many, page 37

Hard shoulder, page 109

Flee The Hunt!, page 108

Descriptor, page 19

Quick, page 24

Perception, page 17

Deception, page 16

Focus, page 58

Works the Back Alleys, page 86

Lockpicking, page 17

Stealth, page 18

Character Arcs, page 141

Defeat a Foe, page 147

ELOCUTIONIST

It was definitely human once, at least based on how it was screaming, but it was thin, with bits of it twisted and discoloured, covered in small, scurrying shapes.

Its face was the most human part of it remaining, except for the two black and hollow spaces where its eyes once were. From which now poured an endless stream of scuttling legs and fangs. The mouth was full of them too, but I could see, as they grasped desperately at Greg, it was trying to say, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Tell her I'm sorry." But words were not what tumbled from those lips.

—MAG 123: "Web Development"

When investigating people's experiences with the supernatural and the weird, sometimes the most difficult aspect is just getting them to talk about it. You have a way with people, and you can get them to open up to you. Your keen perceptions even tell you what they won't say aloud. You also know how to use words to get what you want. You are the spokesperson of the investigation—from generating cover stories to fast-talking your way past someone being an obstacle, you are the secret weapon. And to top it all off, you're good for boosting your allies' morale and encouraging their actions. You're good to have around.

Individual Role: Elocutionists are smart and charismatic. They like people and, more important, they understand them. This helps elocutionists get others to do what needs to be done.

Group Role: The Elocutionist is often the spokesperson of the group, serving as the one who speaks for all and negotiates with others. Combat and action are not an Elocutionist's strong suits, so other characters sometimes have to defend them in times of danger.

Societal Role: An Elocutionist can be anyone who's good with people. They're often team leaders in a business, or even political or religious leaders. It's worth mentioning, however, that many come from a background of con artistry and crime.

Advanced Elocutionists: Higher-tier Elocutionists use their abilities to manipulate groups of people as well as aid and nurture their friends. They can talk their way out of danger and even use their words as weapons.

Supernatural Elocutionists: Elocutionists with special abilities can use them to compel people to reveal information or flee, or even to control them. Such abilities are marked with 👁.

ELOCUTIONIST STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	8
Speed	9
Intellect	11

The player has 6 additional points to assign to the stat Pools as they wish.

FIRST-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

First-tier Elocutionists have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Fit: You have a Might Edge of 0, a Speed Edge of 0, and an Intellect Edge of 1.

People Skills: You are trained in two people-related skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: deception, discerning motive, intimidation, persuasion, or performance. Enabler.

Cypher Use: You can have two cyphers at a time.

Weapons: You're practiced with light and medium weapons and suffer no penalty when using them. You have an inability to use heavy weapons. Enabler.

Locution Abilities: You're good with words. Good with people. You're charming, persuasive, and clever. Choose two of the abilities listed below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

Connected: You know people who get things done—not just respected people in positions of authority, but also a variety of online hackers and regular street criminals. These people are not necessarily your friends and might not be trustworthy, but they owe you a favor. You and the GM should work out the details of your contacts. Enabler.

De-Stress (1 Intellect point): While resting or relaxing with allies for an hour, you and they lose 1 more point of Stress than normal. Enabler.

Encouragement (1 Intellect point): While you maintain this ability through ongoing inspiring oration, your allies within short range ease one of the following task types (your choice): defense tasks, attack tasks, or tasks related to any skill that you are trained or specialized in. Action.

Enthrall (1 Intellect point): While talking, you grab and keep another creature's attention, even if the creature can't understand you. For as long as you do nothing but speak (you can't even move), the other creature takes no actions other than to defend itself, even over multiple rounds. If the creature is attacked, the effect ends. Action.

Inner Defense: Life's trials have toughened you and made you hard to read. You are trained in any task to resist another creature's attempt to discern your true feelings, beliefs, or plans. You are likewise trained in resisting torture, telepathic intrusion, and mind control. Enabler.

Knowledge Skills: You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two areas of knowledge such as history, geography, psychology, and so on. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

Secret Agendas (1 Intellect point): When speaking with at least two different NPCs for at least a minute, you pick up on subtle cues to determine one of two things (you choose):

- The relationship between the NPCs (including their actual feelings about each other, at least generally).
- If there are at least three NPCs, you pick the odd one out. You determine which of the group is least like the others.

For example, if talking to a married couple secretly on the verge of divorce, you can pick up on subtle indications of resentment or concealed hostility. If you're interacting with a group of people but one of them secretly works for The Web, you can pick up on something odd about them (but not specific details). Enabler.

The Web, page 176

Understanding (1 Intellect point): You observe or study a creature or object. Your next interaction with that creature or object gains one asset. Action.

Verbal Disguise (1 Intellect point): You can mimic the voice and speech patterns of a person you have heard speak before, allowing you to make one significant statement. If the person you are speaking to sees you, they will not fall for the deception, so this ability is likely best used over the telephone, in the dark, or with a heavy physical disguise. You can continue to use this ability, but the cost is 1 Intellect point for each important statement you make. This ability doesn't make you any more persuasive—it merely disguises who is speaking. If the GM rules that you've said something the listener simply cannot believe the mimicked speaker would say, you immediately fail; if you've said more than one thing, the listener knows that none of it has come from the mimicked speaker. Enabler.

SECOND-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

Choose two of the locution abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Agitate (2 Intellect points): You shout at a target you can see and who can easily hear you, and on a successful Intellect-based roll, they move an immediate distance in any direction you wish (because they're startled, they heed a fake warning, or they're otherwise unconsciously induced to do so). Action.

Cold Reading (2 Intellect points): When you spend at least five minutes talking to a person, you can ask the GM one question about that person and get an answer. Alternatively, you can forgo the question and simply ease all tasks involving interaction with the person for 24 hours. You cannot use this more than one time per person per 24 hours. Action to initiate; five minutes to complete.

Defuse (1 Intellect point): During the course of an investigation, your questions sometimes elicit an angry or even violent response. Through dissembling, verbal distraction, calming words, or similar evasion, you prevent a person from attacking anyone or anything for one round, and your next interaction with them is eased. Action.

Disincentivize (1 Intellect point): With some demoralizing words, you hinder all actions attempted by any number of targets within short range who can understand you. You choose which targets are affected. Affected targets' actions are hindered for one round. Action.

Gather Intelligence (2 Intellect points): While within or near a large group of people, you can ask around about any topic you choose and come away with useful information. You can ask a specific question, or you can simply obtain general facts. You also get a good idea of the general layout of the location involved, note the presence of all major sites, and perhaps even notice obscure details. For example, not only do you find out if anyone in the neighborhood has seen the missing boy, but you also get a working knowledge of the layout of the neighborhood, note all the good hiding places, and realize that everyone seems to be leery of one old house. Action to initiate; about an hour to complete.

Inspire Aggression (2 Intellect points): Your words twist the mind of a character within short range who is able to understand you, unlocking their more primitive instincts. As a result, they gain an asset on their Might-based attack rolls for one minute. Action.

Inspiring Ease: Through stories, songs, art, or other forms of entertainment, you inspire your friends. After spending 24 hours with you, once per day each of your friends can ease one task of their choice. This benefit is ongoing while you remain in the friend's company. It ends if you leave, but it resumes if you return to the friend's company within 24 hours. If you leave the friend's company for more than 24 hours, you must spend another 24 hours together to reactivate the benefit. Enabler.

Quick Wits: When performing a task that would normally require spending points from your Intellect Pool, you can spend points from your Speed Pool instead. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

THIRD-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

Third-tier Elocutionists have the following abilities:

Expert Cypher Use: You can have three cyphers at a time.

Locution Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Blend In (4 Intellect points): For the next minute, you blend in—creatures still see you, but they attach no importance to your presence. While blending in, you are specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. This effect ends if you do something to reveal your presence or position—attacking, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on. If this occurs, you can regain the remaining period of effect by taking an action to focus on seeming innocuous and as if you belong. Action to initiate or reinitiate.

Communication (2 Intellect points): You can convey a basic concept to a creature that normally can't speak or understand speech. The creature can also give you a very basic answer to a simple question. Action.

Grand Deception (3 Intellect points): You convince an intelligent creature that can understand you and isn't hostile of something that is wildly and obviously untrue. Action.

Mind Games (3 Intellect points): You use lies and trickery, mockery, and perhaps even hateful, obscene language against a foe that can understand you. If successful, the foe is stunned for one round and cannot act, and it is dazed in the following round, during which time its tasks are hindered. Action.

Oratory (4 Intellect points): When speaking with a group of intelligent creatures that can understand you and aren't hostile, you convince them to take one reasonable action in the next round. A reasonable action should not put the creatures or their allies in obvious danger or be wildly out of character. Action.

Seen Some . . . Stuff: You reduce the Stress you suffer from mental shock or despair by 1. You still suffer Stress from physical injury normally. Enabler.

Slip of the Tongue (3 Intellect points): In a conversation with an NPC, you use verbal trickery to get them to reveal an important piece of information that they were attempting to conceal. You can try to determine the topic of the information, but ultimately the GM determines what the NPC actually says. Action.

Surveillance: All tasks involving monitoring, watching, or tailing a person or place are eased. This includes setting up cameras, microphones, or other equipment. Enabler.

Irresistible Question (3 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You ask a question of one creature within a short distance. If you make a successful Intellect roll, they are compelled to answer the question as truthfully and completely as they can. Enabler.

FOURTH-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

Choose two of the locution abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Anticipate Attack (4 Intellect points): You can sense when and how creatures attacking you will make their attacks. Your Speed defense rolls are eased for one minute. Action.

Cover Story (4 Intellect points): After studying (either up close or from afar) a group, organization, or individual for at least five minutes, you come up with a cover story—an elaborate lie—that the group or individual in question is very likely to believe. If you or anyone else uses the cover story, any deception, persuasion, disguise, or similar task related to the cover story is eased. This benefit lasts until the cover story is irrefutably proven false (which might never happen). Action to initiate.

Heightened Skills: You are trained in two tasks of your choosing (other than attacks or defense). If you choose a task you're already trained in, you instead become specialized in that task. You can't choose a task you're already specialized in. Enabler.

Look for the Tell (4 Intellect points): After spending at least one minute with a person in conversation, you know when they are lying for the next minute. Action to initiate.

Scarred and Hardened: You reduce the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 1. You still suffer Stress from mental shock or despair normally. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Spur Effort (5 Intellect points): Choose an ally within immediate range. If that character applies Effort to a task on their next turn, they get a free level of Effort on that task. Enabler.

Stress (5 Intellect points): Your terrifying, insidious words impose 3 points of Stress (4 points of damage on NPCs) on up to five people you choose that can hear and understand you within short range. Make separate attack rolls against each creature. Action.

Understanding Why (4 Intellect points): If you succeed at a discerning motive task, you fully understand a person's motives and the root causes for why they do what they do. You may not get details, but you get a fair bit of general insight. You might, for example, ascertain that a murderer has a deep-seated insecurity, or that the person helping them owed them a huge debt. Action.

Terrorize (4 Might points and 3 Stress): A creature that can understand you within a short distance suffers 3 points of Stress (4 points of damage to an NPC) and spends their next action fleeing from you as quickly as they can. They will not approach you for an hour afterward unless threatened. Action.

FIFTH-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

Fifth-tier Elocutionists have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can have four cyphers at a time.

Locution Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Performance (4 Intellect points): You let your voice become your instrument. For one hour, you speak with absolute clarity and smoothness, using any manner of tones, vocal ranges, and accents. You can even perfectly imitate the voices of whomever you choose. Anyone hearing you is impressed and positively predisposed to you. For 24 hours, you gain an asset on any interaction task involving them. Action to initiate.

Shrug It Off: You ignore the negative effects of your first Stress level. Enabler.

Soft Speech (5 Intellect points): You convince someone to confide in you in a very short amount of time. They see you not only as a friend but as a trusted confidant. After just one minute of conversation, you need make no further rolls to get the person to tell you literally anything. Enabler.

Stimulate (6 Intellect points): Your words encourage a creature you touch who can understand you. The next action they take is eased by three steps. Action.

Think Your Way Out: You can use points from your Intellect Pool rather than your Might Pool or Speed Pool on any noncombat action. Enabler.

Control (5 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You control the actions of a creature within a short distance who can understand you. This lasts for ten minutes or until they are out of range. If you compel them to do something they would never normally do, you must roll again to maintain your effect. Action.

SIXTH-TIER ELOCUTIONIST

Choose two of the locution abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Inspiring Success (6 Intellect points): When you learn this ability, choose one of the following with your group: Might tasks, Speed tasks, or Intellect tasks. When you apply a level of Effort on a task related to that stat and you succeed on your roll, choose another character within short range. On their next turn, that character has an asset on the next task they attempt using that stat. Enabler.

Mastery With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are specialized in defense tasks of that type. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

Soothing Words (6 Intellect points): A creature that you speak with for at least ten minutes loses all of their accumulated Stress. Action to initiate.

True Communication (6 Intellect points): You establish a bond with one person or creature so uncanny that you can make yourself understood even if you don't share a language. Further, you can communicate on just one sensory level if that's all you have (if they can just see you but not hear you, or hear you but not see you) without any loss of understanding. Once this bond is established, it never goes away. You can bond with only one person or creature at a time. Action.

Condemn (6 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Drawing upon dark forces, you relegate one person to a future of endless despair by telling them something truly horrifying about themselves (true or not) that they henceforth believe deep in their core. They lose their next action, and all their actions afterward are hindered by two steps. Most people thus affected flee if possible. Action.

ELOCUTIONIST EXAMPLE

Freya wants to create an Elocutionist for the campaign. She puts 3 of her additional stat points into her Intellect Pool and 3 into her Speed Pool; her stat Pools are now Might 8, Speed 12, and Intellect 14. As a first-tier character, her Effort is 1, her Might Edge and Speed Edge are 0, and her Intellect Edge is 1. She's smart and charismatic but not particularly tough.

Freya can pick two People Skills; she decides on discerning motive and persuasion, thinking they are the most likely to get the whole truth from NPCs she talks with.

She can also select two more type abilities and starts with De-Stress because she knows situations are likely to be taxing for her and her fellows. Next, she picks Connected because she likes the idea of already having links in the world.

A first-tier Elocutionist can have two cyphers at once, and the GM starts her with like an Avatar, which allows her to treat one action roll as a natural 20, and observer effect, allowing her to find something she might have otherwise missed while investigating.

Freya's character carries a small knife hidden in her bag in case of trouble. As a light weapon, it inflicts 2 points of damage, but attacks with it are eased.

She chooses Smart for her descriptor because who wouldn't want to be smart? The descriptor increases her Intellect Pool to 18. It also suggests Eidetic as an extra ability she can opt for (instead of an extra skill), which eases tasks requiring careful memory. She takes it, as well as the suggested inability in deception.

For her focus, Freya chooses Moves Like a Cat, granting her a final Speed Pool of 18 and training in gymnastics. In the end, she's graceful and quick, charismatic, and hardier than she initially thought. She's ready to investigate scary things.

For her character arc, Freya chooses Fall From Grace. She decides she is becoming obsessed with a Leitner that's been in her family for generations, and her character is fascinated by its secrets.

Discerning motive, page 16
Persuasion, page 17
De-Stress, page 45
Connected, page 45
Like an Avatar, page 110
Observer effect, page 110
Smart, page 25
Descriptors, page 19
Eidetic, page 25
Deception, page 16
Focus, page 58
Moves Like a Cat, page 75
Gymnastics, page 17
Character Arcs, page 141
Fall From Grace, page 149
Leitners, page 267

OCCULTIST

> He walked over to me, and gently stroked my face. His hands smelled strange. Back then I didn't know the scent of blood, and mixed with that faint, saline smell of brackish water. He whispered to me then, when he thought I was asleep, promised to protect me, to make sure that "it wouldn't get me too." There was a strangled sound to his words; I think he might have been crying.
>
> —MAG 9: "A Father's Love"

You've always been fascinated by exactly the things you knew you should leave alone. The mysterious and inexplicable call to you with a dark, low whisper. Your troubled dreams show you things that most people simply could not handle. You're on a dangerous path that will require you to walk among things no human should even be aware of, let alone understand.

The occult in the world you know is not silly fun with a Ouija board, nor something you'd expect from Harry Potter or Gandalf. It's dark and dangerous. It tears at your mind when you delve too deep.

Individual Role: Occultists are intelligent, well-educated people. They can be mysterious and brooding, their minds on dark topics or shadowed with too much sinister knowledge. In the world of The Magnus Archives, the occult is always a subject of darkness, fear, and the forbidden—it's never pleasant or hopeful.

Group Role: The Occultist is along because they likely know more than the others about what the group is getting involved in. They're probably not a fighter or a people person, but more like an investigator. However, the clues and evidence they find is often of a very different nature.

Societal Role: Occultists likely have spent their lives in a library or at home on the internet, perhaps gathering with others with similar interests occasionally. More extroverted Occultists might work as stage (or street) magicians, or as scam artists and thieves. A poor few might even have ended up as fiction writers or game designers.

Advanced Occultists: Higher-tier Occultists use their knowledge of the supernatural to greater and greater benefit, and become quite resilient against occult attacks.

Supernatural Occultists: Occultists might be the characters most likely to develop paranormal abilities. Such abilities are marked with 👁. They can even start the game with one or more such powers, unlike other characters. They also have the widest variety of supernatural abilities to choose from.

Occultists in The Magnus Archives might not have any "real" powers at all, but might just be steeped in the lore and background of the supernatural.

OCCULTIST STAT POOLS

Stat	Pool Starting Value
Might	7
Speed	9
Intellect	12

The player has 6 additional points to assign to the stat Pools as they wish.

FIRST-TIER OCCULTIST

First-tier Occultists have the following abilities:

Effort: Your Effort is 1.

Fit: You have a Speed Edge of 0, a Might Edge of 0, and an Intellect Edge of 1.

Knowledge Skills: You are trained in occultism and one other knowledge skill in which you are not already trained, such as astronomy, biology, geography, history, mathematics, philosophy, physics, psychology, or researching. Enabler.

Cypher Use: You can have three cyphers at a time.

Weapons and The Magnus Archives, page 101

Weapons: You're practiced with light and medium weapons and suffer no penalty when using them. You have an inability when using heavy weapons. Enabler.

Occult Abilities: Your knowledge of the occult is matched only by your knowledge of people (and in particular, fooling them). Choose two of the abilities listed below. You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise.

Already Tainted: You begin the game with access to abilities considered supernatural. Such abilities are marked with 👁. Check with the GM to make certain that this is appropriate for the campaign. Enabler.

Artefact Affinity: Any tasks in which you identify or use an artefact are eased. Enabler.

Esoteric Skills: Your background has led you down many strange rabbit holes. Choose two of the following skills in which you are not already trained: biology, history, identifying, philosophy, physics, publishing, religion, or researching. You become trained in these two skills. Enabler.

Intuition (2 Intellect points): You get a weird feeling when something is not quite right. You don't choose when this ability works—the GM does, telling you to spend the Intellect points and giving you a clue as to what feels wrong. The GM might tell you that something feels bad about opening the door at the end of the hallway, that the man in the hat reminds you of a terrible dream you had, or that the child you're looking for is no longer nearby.

The GM does not have to trigger this ability, and in fact it should be a surprising but occasional insight rather than an always-available ability you can rely on.

If you don't have the points to spend to activate this ability, it doesn't work. Enabler.

Sensitive (1 Intellect point): For the next ten minutes, your tasks to perceive abnormal presences or influences are eased (including those that are usually imperceptible to regular people or animals). Action to initiate.

Slightly Sinister Skills: You are trained in two skills in which you are not already trained. Choose two of the following: deception, disguise, intimidation, pickpocketing, or stealth. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose two different skills. Enabler.

Supernatural Comprehension (2 Intellect points): You identify the parameters of an unnatural effect within an immediate distance, like a curse, the presence of something inhuman, or a spell. This typically requires at least a minute of study and reflection. Action to initiate.

Understanding (1 Intellect point): You observe or study a creature or object. Your next interaction with that creature or object gains one asset. Action.

Ventriloquism (1 Intellect point): For one round, you make it seem as though your voice is coming from somewhere of your choosing within an immediate distance. Action.

Mesmerism (1 Intellect point and 1 Stress): You transfix a person within an immediate distance. The target loses their next action and is unaware of anything that happens during the round unless they are attacked or otherwise shaken out of it. In the following round, they are disoriented and all their actions are hindered. Action.

SECOND-TIER OCCULTIST

Choose two of the occult abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Cold Reading (2 Intellect points): When you spend at least five minutes talking to a person, you can ask the GM one question about that person and get an answer. Alternatively, you can forgo the question and simply ease all tasks involving interaction with the person for 24 hours. You cannot use this more than one time per person per 24 hours. Action to initiate; five minutes to complete.

Hoax (2 Intellect points): With at least ten minutes of preparation, you can use common materials to perpetrate a brief but surprisingly believable fake event. The event lasts only about one round and should be very simple and mostly visual. A frightening shadow lurks in the doorway, a figure runs off into the night, you chop off your finger with a knife, and so on. Typically, if the person you're trying to fool is far away (but can still see your hoax), the task is eased. Action to initiate.

Practiced With Medium Weapons: You can use light and medium weapons without penalty. If you wield a heavy weapon, attacks with it are hindered. Enabler.

Seen Some . . . Stuff: You reduce the Stress you suffer from mental shock or despair by 1. You still suffer Stress from physical injury normally. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

Spout Nonsense (2+ Intellect points): You can fast-talk your way through any conversation involving the occult or the paranormal, using confusing terms and strange synchronistic logic loops that confound even others with knowledge of the subject. The person that you are speaking to stands bewildered and befuddled, unable to take an action for one round. For each additional Intellect point you spend, you can attempt to affect another person with the same gibberish, but they must all be within an immediate distance of you. Action.

Premonition (2 Intellect points): You learn one random fact about a creature, object, or location that is pertinent to a topic you designate. Alternatively, you can choose to learn a creature's level; however, if you do so, you cannot learn anything else about it later with this ability. Action.

Send Thoughts (2+ Intellect points and 2 Stress): You mentally transmit a message to someone you know well. The message can be up to ten words or it can be an image of your devising. The recipient must be within 1 mile (1.6 km), but for every additional point of Intellect you spend, this distance is increased by another mile. Action.

THIRD-TIER OCCULTIST

Third-tier Occultists have the following abilities:

Adroit Cypher Use: You can have four cyphers at a time.

Occult Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Cooperative Sorcery (4 Intellect points): You know a little about magic. If someone stands next to you and uses a supernatural power, you can boost that power by increasing the range by one category, doubling the number of targets, or easing the task for it to take effect. In addition to the Intellect point cost for activating this ability, if the ability you're helping with causes the user Stress, you suffer the same Stress as them. Action.

Embracing the Unknown: Interaction tasks with supernatural beings are eased. Enabler.

Intense Practitioner: If you apply at least one level of Effort to a task involving the supernatural, you get a free level of Effort on that task. Enabler.

Peering Beyond the Veil (3 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You become aware of supernatural activity that you couldn't otherwise perceive. You can see invisible creatures or objects and hear inaudible sounds within a short distance for one hour, and you can get a sense of any supernatural activities that have occurred within that area in the last 24 hours. Action.

Resistance to the Uncanny: The ill effects of using artefacts are mitigated somewhat. You gain 1 less point of Stress than normal when using an artefact. Enabler.

Shatter (2+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): You mystically cause the detonation of an object you choose within long range. The object must be a small, mundane item composed of homogeneous matter (such as a coffee cup, a doorknob, a rock, and so on). The object explodes in an immediate radius, dealing 1 point of damage to all creatures and objects in the area. If you apply Effort to increase the damage, you deal 2 additional points of damage per level of Effort (instead of 3 points); targets in the area take 1 point of damage even if you fail the attack roll. Action.

Supernatural Resistance: Your defense tasks against supernatural effects are eased. Enabler.

FOURTH-TIER OCCULTIST

Choose two of the occult abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Combating the Uncanny: All your attacks against supernatural beings are eased. Enabler.

Heightened Skills: You are trained in two tasks of your choosing (other than attacks or defense). If you choose a task you're already trained in, you instead become specialized in that task. You can't choose a task you're already specialized in. Enabler.

Shrug It Off: You ignore the negative effects of your first Stress level. Enabler.

Think Your Way Out: You can use points from your Intellect Pool rather than your Might Pool or Speed Pool on any noncombat action. Enabler.

Cypher Manifestation (4 Might points and 3 Stress): You transform one cypher that you currently have into a small physical object a person could hold in their hand. You can then give that object to another person for them to use. It counts against their cypher limit. Action.

Edit Memories (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You reach into the mind of a person within immediate range and edit the last five minutes of their memory. For example, you could make someone on guard forget they ever saw you pass by, misremember a code they just learned, or believe a different person pushed them down than who actually did. Action.

FIFTH-TIER OCCULTIST

Fifth-tier Occultists have the following abilities:

Master Cypher Use: You can have five cyphers at a time.

Occult Abilities: Choose two of the abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

See the Truth: You see through magical disguises, veils, illusions, and similar obfuscations, with no roll needed. Beware, though: sometimes the truth might be dangerous, with revelations leading to Stress. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Stern Stuff: You no longer suffer Stress from seeing something supernatural. All other stressful events still affect you, including using the supernatural. Enabler.

Stressed Mind (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): With a touch and a whisper, you give a creature such mind-spinning dread that they suffer 6 points of Stress (6 points of damage for an NPC). Action.

Vanish From Sight (5 Intellect points and 4 Stress): You literally disappear, turning invisible for up to one minute. During this time, you can only move or gently manipulate objects (like open doors). If you do anything else, such as talk or attack, you reveal yourself as you do so. If this occurs, you can regain the remaining invisibility effect by taking an action to hide your position. Action to initiate.

SIXTH-TIER OCCULTIST

Choose two of the occult abilities listed below (or from a lower tier). You can't choose the same ability more than once unless its description says otherwise. You can also replace one of your lower-tier abilities with a different one from a lower tier.

Craft Artefact: This ability allows for the creation of a single artefact. You can take this ability more than once to make multiple artefacts. The process is long, difficult, and confounding. You and the GM should work together to determine the particulars because every artefact is different. However, the creation process should involve:

- Plans, recipes, or instructions from a prior Avatar or occultist (or, alternatively, a dream or vision from one or more Entities) that are extremely difficult to obtain.
- Cost in time in terms of months or even years, sometimes working steadily, sometimes with breaks for other activities.
- Cost in money similar to an exorbitant item.
- Cost in mental and/or physical well-being. Very likely 3 points of Stress gained during each day of the process, and a permanent loss of 3 points from your stat Pools.

The finished artefact should create or produce a single effect equal to a sixth-tier ability from any type or focus, and the Stress cost of using it should be 3.

Defending Others: Allies within an immediate distance ease their defenses against supernatural effects. Enabler.

Mastery With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are specialized in defense tasks of that type. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

Meditative Restoration (8 Intellect points): You rid yourself of 3 points of Stress each minute you do nothing else. Action to initiate.

Ghost (6 Intellect points and 5 Stress): For the next ten minutes, you gain an asset to sneaking tasks. During this time, you can move through solid barriers at a rate of 1 foot (30 cm) per round, and you can perceive while phased within a barrier or object, which allows you to peek through walls. Action to initiate.

Psychokinetic Attack (6 Might points and 5 Stress): You can use this attack in one of two ways. The first is to pick up a heavy object and hurl it at someone within short range. This attack is an Intellect action, and if successful, it deals 6 points of damage to the target and to the hurled object (which could be another foe, although that would require two rolls—one roll to grab the first foe and another roll to hit the second foe with the first). The second way to use this attack is to unleash a shattering burst of power that works only against an inanimate object no larger than half your size. Make an Intellect roll to instantly destroy the object; the task is eased by three steps compared to breaking it with brute strength. Action.

Attacking objects, page 127

OCCULTIST EXAMPLE

Teri wants to create an Occultist, hoping her extra knowledge about the supernatural will make a difference. She decides for a well-rounded character, so she puts 2 of her 6 additional points into each stat Pool, giving her a Might Pool of 9, a Speed Pool of 11, and an Intellect Pool of 14. Her Occultist is smart and quick. She has an Intellect Edge of 1, a Might Edge of 0, and a Speed Edge of 0. As a first-tier character, her Effort is 1.

She is automatically trained in occultism as one of her Knowledge Skills. Given a choice for the second, she selects astronomy.

Teri also picks two type abilities. The first is Intuition, which could cue her when something strange is happening. The second is Supernatural Comprehension, allowing her character to identify aspects of an unnatural effect like a curse, the presence of something inhuman, or a spell.

Her character can have three cyphers. The GM gives her deathly silent and still, useful when she needs to hide; desperate effort, which grants extra Effort; and stare into The Vast, which returns spent points to her Intellect Pool.

For her descriptor, Teri chooses Pretentious, which adds 2 points to her Intellect Pool, bringing it to 16. She also gains training in Intellect defense rolls. She begins developing a backstory about how her character used to go around debunking paranormal claims made by scammers and psychics—until one day, she couldn't.

For her focus, she chooses Leads. This gives her Natural Charisma, which grants training in all social interactions. At first tier, Teri also gains Good Advice, which means when she helps another character, the other character has an additional asset to their task.

For her character arc, Teri chooses Aid a Friend. She decides that when her character was young, she had a mentor who introduced her to the paranormal. That mentor has since gone missing. She'd like to find and help them if she can, or at least gain closure if the worst has happened.

Stare into The Vast, page 112

Descriptors, page 19

Pretentious, page 24

Occultism, page 17

Astronomy, page 16

Focus, page 58

Leads, page 70

Natural Charisma, page 70

Good Advice, page 70

Intuition, page 52

Supernatural Comprehension, page 53

Character Arcs, page 141

Aid a Friend, page 145

Deathly silent and still, page 108

Desperate effort, page 108

CHAPTER 4

CHARACTER FOCUS

Many foci allow you to take the same ability multiple times across tier progression. For example, Would Rather Be Reading grants the Knowledge Is Power ability several times.

> Their chests moved up and down slowly, so Alex was sure they'd been alive, but . . . their eyes stared vacantly into the space in front of them, and everything else about them seemed lifeless and empty. Some of them were lying with their heads or legs at odd, uncomfortable-looking angles, but they either didn't notice or didn't care. They all seemed to have fallen away from a single, central point in the room. Kneeling there was the only figure who hadn't collapsed.
>
> She was an older woman, Alex said, and was almost completely naked. Her skin was pale and her head was shaved. Like the others, she was still, with only the movement of her chest showing she was still alive, but unlike those on the floor, her eyes moved. They gently swept from one side of the room to the other, like she was searching for something.
>
> —MAG 94:
> "Dead Woman Walking"

Your focus helps make your character unique. Ideally, no two PCs in a group should have the same focus. A focus gives a character benefits when they are created and each time they ascend to the next tier. It's the verb of the sentence "I am an *adjective noun* who *verbs*."

This chapter contains a wide variety of foci to choose from, such as Explores Dark Places, Infiltrates, and Runs Away.

When you choose a character focus, you get a special connection to one or more of your fellow PCs, and one or two first-tier abilities. Most foci don't grant additional equipment, but a few do. For instance, someone who Carries a Gun needs a gun.

Each focus also offers suggestions for GM intrusions specific to that focus.

As you progress to new tiers, your focus grants you more abilities. Each tier's benefits are independent of and cumulative with benefits from other tiers (unless indicated otherwise). So if a first-tier ability grants +1 to damage and a fourth-tier ability also grants +1 to damage, when the character reaches fourth tier, a total of +2 to damage is granted.

At the end of this chapter, you'll also find information about the abilities that PCs can acquire if they become Avatars.

LIST OF FOCI

- Carries a Gun
- Does a Bit of This and That
- Explores Dark Places
- Fights Dirty
- Helps Their Friends
- Infiltrates
- Leads
- Learns Quickly
- Looks for Trouble
- Moves Like a Cat
- Needs No Weapon
- Never Says Die
- Practically Lives Online
- Runs Away
- Solves Mysteries
- Wears a Badge
- Works the Back Alleys
- Would Rather Be Reading

THE STORY BEHIND YOUR FOCUS

The story of how your character came to have the focus that they do is yours to define, as long as it fits within the setting. For example, if your character Carries a Gun, maybe they learned shooting growing up in a rural area where hunting was a way of life, or perhaps they were in the military. Maybe they picked up a gun one day after a terrible personal experience and have been trying to become proficient at the gun range ever since.

Giving a little thought to the origin of your character's focus can really help flesh out their background, tie them to places and people, and connect to other parts of their character, such as your descriptor. For instance, maybe the reason you're Suspicious is because the time you weren't, you lived to regret it. Maybe your character arc is all about learning truths behind something that happened to you earlier.

STARTING CHARACTERS AND THE PARANORMAL

You'll notice that essentially none of the foci here presume that the character has had paranormal experience, and none of them offer supernatural abilities. In The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game, your starting character might be interested in the paranormal, and they might even believe in the paranormal, but they haven't been confronted with definitive evidence of it (questionable experiences in one's background are fine). Players that want to play a character with a background involving actual experiences with monsters, artefacts, or the like, as presented in the podcast, should work with the GM to ensure it fits with the setting.

Suspicious, page 26

FOCI

CARRIES A GUN

GM intrusion: *Misfire or jam! The attack fails and the action is lost, plus an additional action is needed to fix the problem.*

You're a proficient adversary when armed. Hundreds of hours of training mean that you don't crack when under fire; you take care of business before the bad guys even know you're there. Those who are Carry a Gun might be cops, crooks, hunters, or citizens interested in protecting themselves.

You dress in clothing that allows you either to conceal your weapon or to quickly access it, and preferably both, which might be why you're probably known for your trench coat.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. In the recent past, while doing a little target practice, you accidentally winged them, leaving them badly wounded. It's up to that PC to decide whether they resent, fear, or forgive you.
2. Pick one other PC. You once overheard them say that guns are dangerous weapons and no one should have one. It's up to you whether you want to prove them right or wrong.
3. Pick one other PC. That character's mother gave you the gun you now wield.
4. Pick one other PC. This character seems to think you're famous for something, but you know they're mistaken. It's up to you whether you set them straight.

Additional Equipment: A firearm and three magazines of ammo.

Minor Effect Suggestion: After being hit on the side of the head, the target is deafened for a few minutes.

Major Effect Suggestion: An artery hit causes the foe to bleed for 1 point of damage each round until they succeed at a difficulty 3 Intellect or Speed task to bind the wound.

TIER 1

Gunner: You inflict 1 additional point of damage with guns. Enabler.

Practiced With Guns: You are practiced with guns and suffer no penalty when using one. Enabler.

TIER 2

Careful Shot: You can spend points from either your Speed Pool or your Intellect Pool to apply levels of Effort to increase your gun damage. Each level of Effort adds 3 points of damage to a successful attack, and if you spend a turn lining up your shot, each level of Effort instead adds 5 points of damage to a successful attack. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Trained Gunner or Damage Dealer as your tier 3 ability.

Trained Gunner: You can choose from one of two benefits. Either you are trained in using guns, or you have the Spray ability (which has a cost of 2 Speed points). Enabler.

Spray, page 39

Damage Dealer: You inflict an additional 3 points of damage with your gun. Enabler.

TIER 4

Snap Shot: You can make two gun attacks as a single action, but the second attack is hindered by two steps. Enabler.

TIER 5

Arc Spray (3 Speed points): If a weapon has the ability to fire rapid shots without reloading (usually called a rapid-fire weapon), you can fire your weapon at up to three targets (all next to one another) at once. Make a separate attack roll against each target. Each attack is hindered. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Special Shot or Lethal Damage as your tier 6 ability.

Special Shot: When you hit a target with a gun attack, you can choose to reduce the damage by 1 point but hit the target in a precise spot. Some of the possible effects include (but are not limited to) the following:

- You can shoot an object out of someone's hand.
- You can shoot the leg, wing, or other limb it uses to move, reducing its maximum movement speed to immediate for a few days or until it receives expert medical care.
- You can shoot a strap holding a backpack, a protective device, or a similarly strapped-on item so that it falls off.

Enabler.

Lethal Damage: When you hit with your gun on a standard attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.

DOES A BIT OF THIS AND THAT

You've had a number of jobs in your life, but nothing's really stuck. No one thing consumes you, compels you, or drives you. You float from event to event. That doesn't mean you're unhappy, necessarily. It's not a bad life. You like to take it easy. Appreciate the little things. Learn new things, and then switch to something else when that gets boring. Possibly partake in a few relaxing substances now and again. Enjoy the rug that ties the whole room together. All of which is to say, you know a little about a lot of different things.

You dress casually. You might be in decent physical shape—if, you know, that's your thing—or maybe you're more cerebral (a pseudo-intellectual). It's all good.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. They have always been there for you. Gotten you out of jams from time to time. They're cool.

2. Pick one other PC. This character is too uptight for your tastes. They've got to learn to chill, and you hope you're the one to give them that perspective.

3. Pick one other PC. You're a little jealous of this character because they're better than you at your favorite hobby (bowling, karaoke, knitting, coding, or whatever it is).

4. Pick one other PC. You owe them money, and you're sincere in your promise to pay it back. You just need things to go your way, financially speaking.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You draw on your experiences to ease your next action.

Major Effect Suggestion: You get a free, no-action recovery roll.

GM intrusions: *New situations are confounding and stressful. Past actions (or inactions) come back to haunt the character.*

TIER 1

Life Lessons: Choose any two noncombat skills. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

TIER 2

Totally Chill: Your ten-minute recovery roll takes you only one round. Enabler.

When using Drawing on Life's Experiences, the player is encouraged to make up an anecdote, even if only in overview, that serves as a basis for gaining the ability's benefit.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Skill With Attacks or Improvise as your tier 3 ability.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Improvise (2 Intellect points): When you perform a task in which you are not trained, you can improvise to gain an asset on the task. The asset might be a tool you cobble together, a sudden insight into overcoming a problem, or a rush of dumb luck. Enabler.

TIER 4

Life Lessons: Choose any two noncombat skills. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

Greater Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task, even one in which you are already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type, or specialized if you are already trained. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

TIER 5

Greater Enhanced Potential: You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Drawing on Life's Experiences or Quick Wits as your tier 6 ability.

Drawing on Life's Experiences (6 Intellect points): You've seen a lot and done a lot, and that experience comes in handy. Ask the GM one question, and you'll receive a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Action.

Quick Wits: When performing a task that would normally require spending points from your Intellect Pool, you can spend points from your Speed Pool instead. Enabler.

EXPLORES DARK PLACES

You feel most at home creeping through cellars, empty homes, and warehouses by night, tunnels and warrens beneath the street, and when possible, honest-to-goodness caves. Sunlight and empty skies? No, that's not your shtick. If you're being honest, open spaces might even make you a bit uncomfortable. Which is why you prefer the gloom and press of dark places. That's where you can find lost things—hopefully valuable—under the cover of shadow.

Most likely, you wear dark clothing to help you blend into the blackness. On the other hand, you might wear sensible garments and gear because you have serious and dangerous business to attend to in the dark.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. This character has been your companion during previous expeditions, and the two of you work so well together that you both gain an asset to any die rolls when you collaborate on the same noncombat task.

2. Pick two other PCs. You think you once saw them through a keyhole doing something illegal. You can choose whether or not to share that information. The characters can choose whether it was really them (it could have been neither, one, or both), and they may or may not share that information in return.

3. Pick one other PC. This person always seems to hear you, no matter how stealthy you try to be.

4. Pick one other PC. They are so loud in everything they do that you feel obligated to try to help them learn to move more quietly through the world. Whether or not they are interested is up to them.

Minor Effect Suggestion: The target is also dazed for one round, during which time all of its tasks are hindered.

Major Effect Suggestion: The target is also stunned and loses its next turn.

TIER 1

Superb Explorer: You are trained in perception, endurance, and gymnastics tasks. Enabler.

TIER 2

Superb Infiltrator: You are trained in lockpicking and mechanics. Enabler.

Eyes Adjusted: You are not hindered in darkness and can see faintly even in utter darkness. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Nightstrike or Slippery Customer as your tier 3 ability.

GM intrusions: *Possessions fall out of pockets or bags in the dark; maps get lost. Information gained fails to include an important detail.*

Nightstrike: When you attack a foe in dim light or darkness, you get a free level of Effort on the attack. Enabler.

Slippery Customer: When you apply Effort to tasks involving escaping from bonds, fitting in tight spaces, and other contortionist tasks, you get a free level of Effort on the task. Thanks to your experience, you are also trained in Speed defense tasks. Enabler.

TIER 4

Hard-Won Resilience: In your explorations of dark places, you've been exposed to all sorts of terrible things and are developing a general resistance. You reduce any Stress you gain, from any source, by 1 point. Enabler.

TIER 5

Dark Explorer: You ignore penalties for any action (including fighting) in extremely dim light or in cramped spaces. Because you have the Eyes Adjusted ability, you can act without penalty even in total darkness. You are trained in stealth tasks while in dim or no light. Enabler.

Stealth, page 18

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Blinding Attack or Dark Flow as your tier 6 ability.

Blinding Attack (3 Speed points): If you have a source of light, you can use it to make a melee attack against a target. If successful, the attack deals no damage, but the target is blinded for one minute. Action.

Dark Flow (6 Intellect points): For the next hour, you fully immerse yourself in the practice and craft of operating in the dark. When you apply a level of Effort to stealth, lockpicking, endurance, and perception tasks, you get two free levels of Effort on the task, as long as it is done in dim light or in the dark. Action to initiate.

FIGHTS DIRTY

You know one thing for certain: the only important element of a fight is who wins. How? Why? These questions are inconsequential. Thus, you'll do anything to win a fight. Some might say you have no honor, no class, or some other foolish statement, but they're missing the point. You come out on top when things get violent—and that's all that matters.

You bite, scratch, kick, and trip. You tangle foes in draperies, push them down stairs, and throw dirt in their eyes. You trick them into looking the wrong way, call them names, and say terrible things about their mothers.

Maybe you learned your methods while living on the streets, or maybe you barely survived a particularly horrific battle in a military campaign. Perhaps you simply have never bought into the idea of rules or honor when your life is on the line.

You're likely to carry a few hidden tricks, sometimes literally up your sleeve. You might have a knife in your boot, a poisoned needle in your purse or wallet, a razor in the hem of your scarf, or a handful of stinging and itching powder in a hidden pocket. Your clothing probably has a lot of pockets, actually—more than a few of them well hidden.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. They're good in a fight, but if you could teach them a few of your tricks, they'd really excel.
2. Pick one other PC. In the past, they taught you a few tricks to use in a fight.
3. Pick one other PC. This character doesn't seem to approve of your methods.
4. Pick one other PC. Long ago, the two of you were on opposite sides of a fight. You won, using your particular tactics. Now they're interested in a (friendly) rematch at some point and claim to be ready for you.

Additional Equipment: You have a weapon that is easily hidden and a dose of level 3 poison that inflicts 6 points of damage.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You manage to make your foe trip and fall prone.

Major Effect Suggestion: You tangle something around your foe's legs, and they not only fall down but also lose their next turn.

TIER 1

Taking Advantage: When your foe is prone, weakened, dazed, stunned, moved down the damage track, or disadvantaged in some other way, your attacks against that foe are eased beyond any other modifications due to the disadvantage. Enabler.

TIER 2

Eye Gouge (2 Might points): You make an attack against a creature with an eye. The attack is hindered, but if you hit, the creature has trouble seeing for the next hour. During this time, the creature's tasks that rely on sight (most tasks) are hindered. Action.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Spot Weakness or Surprise Attack as your tier 3 ability.

Spot Weakness: If a creature that you can see has a special weakness, such as a vulnerability to fire, a negative modification to perception, and so on, you know what it is. (Ask and the GM will tell you.) Enabler.

Surprise Attack: If attacking from a hidden vantage, with surprise, or before your opponent has acted, you get an asset on the attack. On a successful hit, you inflict 2 additional points of damage. Enabler.

TIER 4

Mind Games (3 Intellect points): You use lies and trickery, mockery, and perhaps even hateful, obscene language against a foe that can understand you. If successful, the foe is stunned for one round and cannot act, and it is dazed in the following round, during which time its tasks are hindered. Action.

Capable Fighter: Your attacks deal 1 additional point of damage. Enabler.

TIER 5

Using the Environment (4 Intellect points): You find some way to use the environment to your advantage in a fight. For the next ten minutes, attack rolls and Speed defense rolls are eased. Action to initiate.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Twisting the Knife or Murderer as your tier 6 ability.

Twisting the Knife (4 Might points): In a round after successfully striking a foe with a melee weapon, you can opt to automatically deal standard damage to the foe with that same weapon without any modifiers (2 points for a light weapon, 4 points for a medium weapon, or 6 points for a heavy weapon). Action.

Murderer (8+ Might points): With a swift and sudden attack, you strike a foe in a vital spot. If the target is level 4 or lower, it is killed outright. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. Action.

> Six years ago, Calvin Benchley became the first human being I murdered. I beat him round the head as he was coming out of a bar, drove him to my usual spot and shot him five times in the chest with a handgun taken from the evidence lock-up. He didn't beg for his life. He didn't say a word. I don't think he even recognised me. He was harder to get rid of than the vampires, but I managed it.
>
> —MAG 82: "The Eyewitnesses"

GM intrusions: *People look poorly upon those who cheat or fight without honor. Sometimes a dirty trick backfires.*

HELPS THEIR FRIENDS

It's in your nature to help your friends in the little things and the big. They're your friends. Maybe you've always had them. Or perhaps you never had friends before and are grateful to be part of something bigger than yourself. Or maybe you had friends but lost them, and this is your chance to redeem yourself. It's not an obligation that makes you so selfless. Maybe it's not even a choice. When you see that they need a helping hand, you offer it without thinking; that's what friends do.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. The first time you saw a friend in trouble, you failed to offer aid. You don't know if your friend knows. You suspect not, but you're thinking about telling them.
2. Pick one other PC. You helped your friend in some minor illicit activity. Now you feel guilty about it, and a bit angry at your friend even though it was your choice to help.
3. Pick one other PC. They've always been there for you and helped you when you couldn't help yourself.
4. Pick one other PC. You both tried to help a mutual friend but failed. Now that mutual friend is gone (dead, lost, moved away, or made new friends) and you feel like it's your fault. You're not sure if your friend blames you or not.

Additional Equipment: Picture of you and your friends.

Also, if you wish, you can swap an ability gained from your type for the following.

Advice From a Friend (1 Intellect point): You know your friends' strengths and weaknesses, and how to motivate them to succeed. When you give an ally a suggestion involving their next action, the character is trained in that action for one round. Action.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You coach a friend, easing their next action.

Major Effect Suggestion: You provide aid to a friend, granting them a free, no-action recovery roll.

TIER 1

Friendly Help: If your friend tries a task and fails, they can try again without spending Effort if you help. You provide this advantage to your friend even if you are not trained in the task that they are retrying. Enabler.

Courageous: You are trained in Intellect defense tasks and initiative tasks. Enabler.

TIER 2

Weather the Vicissitudes: Helping your friends means being able to stand up to everything the world throws at you. You ignore the first point of Stress you gain in a given day (resets after you take your ten-hour rest). Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Buddy System or Skill With Attacks as your tier 3 ability.

Buddy System (3 Intellect points): Choose one character standing next to you. That character becomes your buddy for ten minutes. You are trained in all tasks involving finding, healing, interacting with, and protecting your buddy. Also, while you stand next to your buddy, both of you have an asset on Speed defense tasks. You can have only one buddy at a time. Action to initiate.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

TIER 4

In Harm's Way (3 Might points): When you put your friends before yourself as your action, you ease all defense tasks for all characters you choose that are adjacent to you. This lasts until the end of your next turn. If one of your friends gains Stress during that period, you can choose to take up to half of it (round up) yourself instead. If one of your friends would take a serious injury, you can take it instead, but only if you're not already impaired or debilitated. Enabler.

Enhanced Physique: You gain 3 points to divide among your Might and Speed Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 5

Inspire Action (4 Intellect points): If one ally can see and easily understand you, you can instruct them to take an action. If the ally chooses to take that exact action, they can do so as an additional action immediately. Doing so doesn't interfere with the ally taking a normal action on their turn. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Deep Consideration or Skill With Defense as your tier 6 ability.

Deep Consideration (6 Intellect points): When you develop a plan that involves you and your friends working together to accomplish a goal, you can ask the GM one very general question about what is likely to happen if you carry out the plan, and you will get a simple, brief answer. In addition, each of you gains an asset to one roll related to enacting the plan you developed together, as long as you put the plan into action within a few days of the plan's creation. Action.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

GM intrusions: *Others sometimes have ulterior motives. The law takes an undue interest. Even when everything goes right, repercussions follow.*

INFILTRATES

You focus on subtlety, guile, and stealth. You have studied, practiced, and trained for years as you attempt to become the perfect infiltrator. You use a wide variety of disguises and tools to perform your duties, but your greatest tools are your own skills and training.

Infiltrators are often spies, agents, or police officers who go undercover. A few are thieves or even assassins. They often wear slick bodysuits and face-concealing masks when not wearing a disguise.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. You've watched them from afar for some time before you actually met and became allies. It's up to you whether you want to tell them now.
2. Pick one other PC. No matter how hard you try, you cannot seem to hide from them.
3. Pick two other PCs. The three of you worked as a team on a mission long ago, but you had a falling out.
4. Pick one other PC. That character is your sibling (if the player agrees), and thus you look very much alike.

Minor Effect Suggestion: Your opponent is so startled by your moves that they are dazed, during which time their tasks are hindered.

Major Effect Suggestion: All opponents within short range are so startled by your moves that they are dazed, during which time their tasks are hindered.

GM intrusions: *Spies are treated harshly when caught. Allies disavow infiltrators who get caught. Some secrets are better left unknown.*

TIER 1

Stealthy: You are trained in your choice of two of the following skills: deception, disguise, lockpicking, pickpocketing, or stealth. You can choose this ability multiple times, but you must select different skills each time. Enabler.

Sense Attitudes: You are trained in discerning motive. Enabler.

TIER 2

Impersonate (2 Intellect points): For one hour, you alter your voice, posture, and mannerisms, whip together a disguise, and gain an asset on an attempt to impersonate someone else, whether it is a specific individual (Bob the cop) or a general role (a police officer). Action to initiate.

Flight Not Fight: If you use your action only to move, all Speed defense tasks are eased. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Awareness or Skill With Attacks as your tier 3 ability.

Awareness: When you spend a level of Effort on a perception task, you gain a free level Effort to that task. Action.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

TIER 4

Nearly Invisible (3 Speed points): For the next ten minutes, you fully immerse yourself in the practice and craft of not being seen. While hiding, you are specialized in stealth and Speed defense tasks. This effect ends if you do something to reveal your presence or position—attacking, using an ability, moving a large object, and so on. If this occurs, you can regain your status by taking an action to hide your position. Action to initiate or reinitiate.

TIER 5

Evasion: You're hard to affect when you don't want to be affected. You are trained in all defense tasks. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Brainwashing or Spring Away as your tier 6 ability.

Brainwashing (5+ Intellect points): You use trickery and/or well-spoken lies to make someone else temporarily do as you ask. For one minute, if you succeed on an Intellect attack, you direct the actions of a target you speak to. The target must be level 3 or lower. You can allow them to act freely or override their actions on a case-by-case basis as long as you can see and direct them. If someone challenges the target's actions (or something else happens that makes the target question your directions), you must succeed on another Intellect attack roll as you verbally attempt to reassure them, or the target stops doing as you say.

In addition to the normal options for using Effort, you can use Effort to increase the maximum level of the target or increase the duration by one minute. Thus, to direct the actions of a level 6 target (three levels above the normal limit) or direct a target for four minutes (three minutes above the normal duration), you must apply three levels of Effort.

Action to initiate.

Spring Away (5 Speed points): Whenever you succeed on a Speed defense roll, you can immediately move up to a short distance. You cannot use this ability more than once in a given round. Enabler.

It became like a game to me, watching out for those soulless husks. Whether on the bus, the street or even meeting a client for work, I would look into their eyes for just a second and see the emptiness inside. I tried to make it a game, at least. Truth was they scared me very deeply. What were they? How did it happen? Were they *born* hollow, or did something scoop them out and leave them like that? And the question that kept me up, staring into the darkness late at night: why did it seem like I was the only one able to see them?

—MAG 122: "Zombie"

Brainwashing may be a sensitive topic for some players and should be approached with all due empathy. In any case, it's not something that should be used on other PCs.

LEADS

Using charisma, natural leadership, and perhaps some training, you command the actions of others, who follow you willingly. You are a politician, a captain, a leader, a manager, or someone else who people tend to listen to. Your confidence makes others naturally listen when you talk, but you also have the wisdom to know what actions would be best for your followers and allies.

When you use Basic Follower, the GM may require that you actually look for a suitable follower.

For more abilities relating to followers, see the follower rules (page 71).

Since you need the respect of others, you probably dress and carry yourself in such a way that inspires, endears, or intimidates. You have a voice—or developed one—suited to barking orders that can be heard even on a noisy battlefield.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. That character was once a follower of yours, but you have since grown to think of them as a peer.
2. Pick one other PC. That character recently mocked you in some fashion that really hurt your feelings. How you deal with this (if at all) is up to you.
3. Pick one other PC. They introduce you to the follower you gain at tier 2.
4. Pick one other PC. They look so much like you that you suspect they might be a half-sibling.

Minor Effect Suggestion: The next time you attempt to persuade, deceive, intimidate, or otherwise influence the same foe, the task is eased.

Major Effect Suggestion: The foe is persuaded, deceived, intimidated, or otherwise influenced for twice as long as normal.

GM intrusions: *Followers fail, betray, lie, become corrupted, get kidnapped, or die.*

TIER 1

Natural Charisma: You are trained in all social interactions, including persuasion, deception, intimidation, and discerning motive. Enabler.

Good Advice: Anyone can help an ally, easing whatever task they're attempting by one step, or two steps if the helper is trained or specialized in that skill. However, you have the benefit of clarity and wisdom. When you help another character, they gain an additional asset. Enabler.

TIER 2

Enhanced Potential: You gain 3 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 2

Basic Follower: You gain a level 2 follower. One of their modifications must be persuasion. You can take this ability multiple times, each time gaining another level 2 follower. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Advanced Command or Expert Follower as your tier 3 ability.

Advanced Command (7 Intellect points): If you succeed on an Intellect attack roll, a target within short range obeys any command you give as long as they can hear and understand you. Further, as long as you continue to do nothing but issue commands (taking no other action), you can give that same target a new command. This effect ends when you stop issuing commands or they are out of short range. Action to initiate.

Expert Follower: You gain a level 3 follower. They are not restricted on their modifications. You can take this ability multiple times, each time gaining another level 3 follower. Alternatively, you could choose to advance a level 2 follower you already have to level 3 and then gain a new level 2 follower. Enabler.

TIER 4

Captivate or Inspire: You can use this ability in one of two ways. Either your words keep the attention of all NPCs of up to level 2 that hear them for as long as you speak, or your words inspire all NPCs that hear them to function as if they were one level higher for the next hour. In either case, you choose which NPCs are affected. If anyone in the crowd is attacked while you're trying to speak to them, you lose the crowd's attention. Action to initiate.

TIER 5

Greater Enhanced Potential: You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Band of Followers or Mind of a Leader as your tier 6 ability.

Band of Followers: You gain four level 3 followers. They are not restricted on their modifications. Enabler.

Mind of a Leader (6 Intellect points): When you develop a course of action to deal with a future situation, you can ask the GM one very general question about what is likely to happen if you carry out the plan, and you will get a simple, brief answer. Action.

FOLLOWERS

Player characters with the Leads focus gain followers. Followers do not need to be paid, fed, or housed, though a character who gains followers can certainly make such arrangements if they wish. A follower is someone whom a character has inspired (or asked) to come work with the character for a time, aiding them in a variety of endeavors. A follower puts the PC's interests ahead of, or at least on par with, their own.

The PC generally makes rolls for their follower when the follower takes actions, though usually a follower's modifications provide an asset to a specific action taken by the PC they follow.

Modifications: A follower can help a PC in one or more tasks, granting the PC an asset to that task. The level of the follower indicates the number of different tasks they can help with. The tasks that the follower is able to help with are predetermined, usually chosen by the PC when they gain the follower. A level 2 follower who the player determines is a spy could grant a PC an asset on two different tasks, such as stealth and deception. Followers cannot help with tasks that they don't have modifications for; for the purpose of helping, treat the follower as if they had inabilities in all nonmodified tasks.

When the follower acts autonomously rather than helping the PC, they act like a normal NPC that has modifications. Thus, the modification increases their effective level for the associated task by one step. For example, the level 2 spy follower with modifications for stealth and deception attempts stealth and deception tasks as if they were level 3 and all other tasks as level 2.

Follower Assets to Combat and Defense: A follower cannot grant an asset to a character's attacks or defense until the follower is level 3 or higher. Even then, the follower can help with attacks and defense only if they have a modification for that kind of task.

Follower Level Progression: A follower increases in level by 1 each time a PC advances two tiers after gaining that follower. When the follower gains a level, the PC also chooses the task that the follower gains a modification for.

Exceptional Follower: When a character gains a follower, there's a small chance that the follower will be exceptional in some way, a cut above other followers of their kind. The GM determines when an exceptional follower is found, possibly as an additional reward for smart or engaging roleplaying where the PCs impress or otherwise positively interact with one or more NPCs, some of whom may later go on to become one of their followers. An exceptional follower has the same qualities as a regular follower but is one level higher.

Pet: Any PC can potentially gain a pet, though a pet typically doesn't provide modifications. If a character with the Leads focus wants a follower to be a pet, however, they can do so using the same rules as long as it makes sense. A pet probably can't grant an asset to an engineering task, for example.

LEARNS QUICKLY

You might not have your dream job, but you do all right. Perhaps events beyond your control set you down a path that led to where you are today, making the best of a mediocre or even a bad situation. Or maybe you're young, and your break just hasn't come along yet. Either way, you work hard to get ahead, deal with bad situations as they arise, and learn quickly whether you're working retail, in a warehouse, or out on the street after a horrific event left you homeless.

You don't stand out in a crowd because you've learned that doing so can draw unwanted attention. That's why you usually wear nondescript clothing, cover up any ink you have, and wear glasses whether you need eye correction or not.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. That character helped you get your current job.
2. Pick one other PC. Through no fault of their own, that character got you fired from your last job by pointing out a problem with something you were connected to only indirectly.
3. Pick one other PC. That character is your cousin.
4. Pick one other PC. You're pretty sure that character hates you, though you don't know why.

Additional Equipment: Two tickets to see a show at a local movie theater.

Minor Effect Suggestion: Your next task, attack, or defense roll (if made within one minute) is eased.

Major Effect Suggestion: Treat the result of your next task, attack, or defense roll (if made within one minute) as if you rolled a natural 18.

GM intrusions: *Accidents and mistakes are great teachers.*

TIER 1

Enhanced Intellect: You gain 3 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Picked Up a Few Things: You are trained in any noncombat task in which you do not already have training. Enabler.

TIER 2

Quick Study: You learn from repetitive actions. You gain an asset to rolls for similar tasks after the first time (such as operating the same device or making attacks against the same foe). Once you move on to a new task, the familiarity with the old task fades—unless you start doing it again. Enabler.

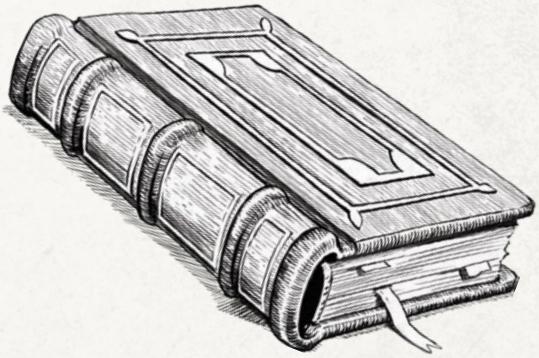
TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Enhanced Intellect Edge or Flex Skill as your tier 3 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also gain Hard to Distract.

Enhanced Intellect Edge: You gain +1 to your Intellect Edge. Enabler.

Flex Skill: At the beginning of each day, choose one task (other than attacks or defense) on which you will concentrate. For the rest of that day, you're trained in that task. You can't use this ability with a skill in which you're already trained to become specialized. Enabler.

Hard to Distract: You are trained in Intellect defense tasks. Enabler.



TIER 4

Pay It Forward (3 Intellect points): You can pass on what you've learned. When you give another character a suggestion involving their next action that is not an attack, their action is eased for one minute. Action.

TIER 5

Enhanced Intellect: You gain 3 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

Learned a Few Things: You are trained in two areas of knowledge of your choice, or specialized in one area of knowledge of your choice. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Two Things at Once or Skill With Defense as your tier 6 ability.

Two Things at Once (6 Intellect points): You divide your attention and take two separate actions this round. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

LOOKS FOR TROUBLE

You're a fighter. A scrapper. You relish taking off the kid gloves and confronting your opposition in the most direct way possible. You don't hide, and you don't shirk. You take things head-on in a physical way. Your friends all likely feel better about going into danger with you at their side or their back.

You probably wear bright colors—yellow, pink, or red—to help you stand out. You might even wear a T-shirt with a printed obscenity for added style.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. Due to past experiences, you watch over them. That PC is your default charge regarding your tier 2 ability, if you have not named someone else.
2. Pick one or two other PCs. They seem pretty tough, and you secretly hope that at some point you'll see who's tougher—you or them.
3. Pick one other PC. If this character is within immediate range when you're in a fight, sometimes they ease your attacks, and sometimes they accidentally hinder them (50% chance either way, determined per fight).
4. Pick one other PC. You used to be in a relationship with them, but it's long since over.

Additional Equipment: A melee weapon of your choice.

Minor Effect Suggestion: The target is also dazed for one round, during which time all tasks they perform are hindered.

Major Effect Suggestion: A piece of equipment worn or held by your opponent is destroyed.

GM intrusions: *Weapons break or fly from even the strongest grip. Brawlers trip and fall. Even the battlefield can work against you with things falling or collapsing.*

TIER 1

Fists of Fury: You inflict 2 additional points of damage with unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Wound Tender: You are trained in healing. Enabler.

TIER 2

Protector: You designate a single character to be your charge. You can change this freely every round, but you can have only one charge at a time. As long as that charge is within immediate range, they gain an asset for Speed defense tasks because you have their back. Enabler.

Breaking: Your tasks to smash physical objects—doors, containers, and other inanimate objects—are eased. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Skill With Attacks or Greater Enhanced Potential as your tier 3 ability.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

Greater Enhanced Potential: You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 4

Knock Out (5+ Might points): You make a melee attack that inflicts no damage. Instead, if the attack hits, make a second Might-based roll. If successful, a foe of level 3 or lower is knocked unconscious for one minute. For each level of Effort used, you can affect one higher level of foe, or you can extend the duration for an additional minute. Action.

TIER 5

Mastery With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are specialized in attacks using that type of weapon. Enabler. (If you aren't already trained in a type of attack, select Skill With Attacks, one of the tier 3 choices, to become trained instead of specialized.)

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Greater Enhanced Might or Lethal Damage as your tier 6 ability.

Greater Enhanced Might: You gain 6 points to your Might Pool. Enabler.

Lethal Damage: Choose one of your existing attacks that inflicts points of damage (depending on your character, this might be a specific weapon, your unarmed attacks, or a supernatural ability). When you hit with that attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.

MOVES LIKE A CAT

You are especially dexterous. Your keen sense of balance and coordination put almost everyone else to shame. Lithe, flexible, and graceful, your natural elegance and poise allow you to navigate your environment with nimble awareness. Smooth and deliberate, you rarely knock things over accidentally, you're more likely to land safely when you fall, and sometimes, you stay safe just by avoiding danger in the first place.

You likely wear tight clothing that doesn't hinder you as you move. Likewise, you probably don't allow yourself to be overburdened by a lot of equipment.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. Their occasional clumsiness and loud behavior irritates you.
2. Pick one other PC. This character comes from the same place you do, and you knew each other as children.
3. Pick one other PC. You aid them with advice and a helping hand when they need it. Anytime the two of you are next to each other, their gymnastics tasks are eased.
4. Pick one other PC. They owe you a significant amount of money.

Gymnastics, page 17

Minor Effect Suggestion: You restore 2 points to your Speed Pool.

Major Effect Suggestion: You can take a second action this round.

GM intrusions: *Even a cat can be clumsy. A jump isn't quite as easy as it looks. An escape move is so overzealous that it sends the character right into harm's way.*

TIER 1

Greater Enhanced Speed: You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Balance: You are trained in gymnastics. Enabler.

TIER 2

Endurance, page 17

Grit: You are trained in endurance tasks. Enabler.

Safe Fall: You gain no Stress from a fall. However, you can still sustain a serious injury on falls over 10 feet (3.5 m). Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Enhanced Speed Edge or Greater Enhanced Speed as your tier 3 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also gain Hard to Hit.

Enhanced Speed Edge: You gain +1 to your Speed Edge. Enabler.

Greater Enhanced Speed: You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Hard to Hit: You are trained in Speed defense tasks. Enabler.

TIER 4

Quick Strike (4 Speed points): You make a melee attack with such speed that it is hard for your foe to defend against, and it knocks them off balance. Your attack is eased by two steps, and the foe, if struck, takes normal damage but is dazed so that their tasks are hindered for the next round. Action.

TIER 5

Slippery: You are eased in any task involving escaping any kind of bond or grasp. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Perfect Speed Burst or Greater Enhanced Speed as your tier 6 ability.

Perfect Speed Burst (6 Speed points): You can take two separate actions this round. Enabler.

Greater Enhanced Speed: You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

GM intrusions: *Striking certain foes hurts you as much as it hurts them. Opponents with weapons have greater reach. Complicated martial arts moves can knock you off balance.*

NEEDS NO WEAPON

You don't use weapons—you *are* a weapon. With powerful punches, kicks, and full-body moves, you inflict incredible damage on your foes. By focusing your energy, the combined power of your body and mind means you can punish your foes without depleting your energy reserves. You might have gained your skills through intense training, from a stint in the military, or because you grew up in a dangerous area and had no choice but to learn. Whatever the origin of your feats, you likely take good care of your body, ensuring that it remains the sharpest, most dependable weapon at your disposal.

Weaponless martial artists are both feared and revered. They wear loose, comfortable clothing that allows them a full range of movement, and they rarely use weapons other than their body's own implements (although some carry items designed to enhance their body movements for greater effect, such as knuckle weapons, knee spikes, or boot blades).

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. They seem to believe that the only true weapons are those that you can hold in your hand, and they might look at you with disdain.
2. Pick one other PC. This character seems incredibly unaware of their body and always happens to get in your way. If you miss your foe and accidentally hit someone else in close range, it's likely to be them.
3. Pick one other PC. You once trained with a close friend of theirs, and you owe that mutual friend much.
4. Pick two other PCs. Once these two heard about your skills, they expressed interest in being your students. However, only one seems to have any aptitude.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You trip your target and knock them prone.

Major Effect Suggestion: You strike your target in a limb, making that limb useless for the next minute.

TIER 1

Fists of Fury: You inflict 2 additional points of damage with unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Scarred and Hardened: You reduce the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 1. You still suffer Stress from mental shock or despair normally. If you already have this ability thanks to your type, you reduce the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 2. Enabler.

TIER 2

Advantage to Disadvantage (3 Speed points): With a number of quick moves, you make an attack against an armed foe, inflicting damage and disarming them so that their weapon is now in your hands or 10 feet (3.5 m) away on the ground—your choice. This disarming attack is hindered. Action.

Unarmed Fighting Style: You are trained in unarmed attacks. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Moving Like Water or Greater Enhanced Potential as your tier 3 ability.

Moving Like Water (3 Speed points): You spin and move so that your defense and attacks are aided by your fluid motion. For one minute, all your attacks and Speed defense tasks gain an asset. Enabler.

Greater Enhanced Potential: You gain 6 points to divide among your stat Pools however you wish. Enabler.

TIER 4

Stand Like Iron (5 Might points): The next attack (in the current encounter) that would normally inflict a serious injury on you gives 2 points of Stress instead. Enabler.

TIER 5

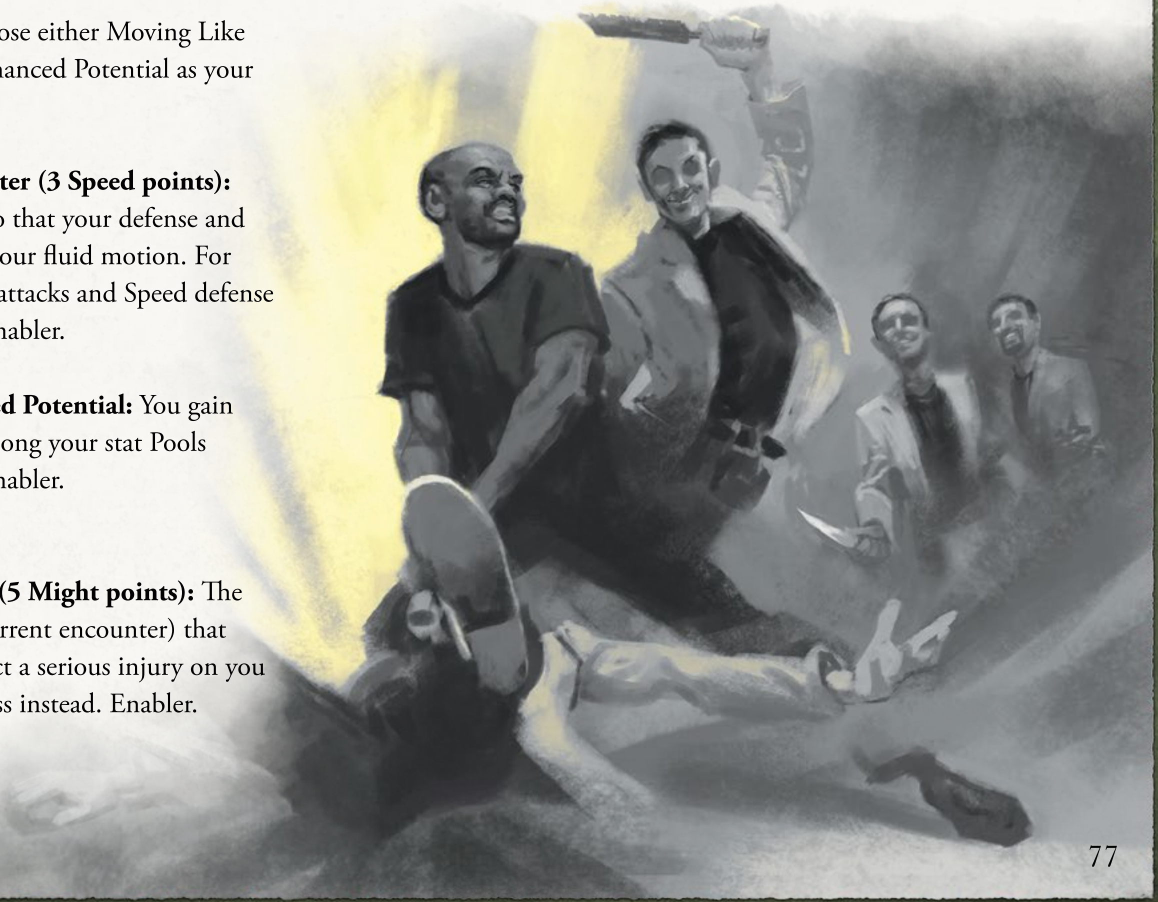
Stun Attack (6 Speed points): You attempt a difficulty 5 Speed task to stun a creature as part of your melee or ranged attack. If you succeed, your attack inflicts its normal damage and stuns the creature for one round, causing it to lose its next turn. If you fail, you still make your normal attack roll, but you don't stun the opponent if you hit. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Master of Unarmed Fighting Style or Lethal Damage as your tier 6 ability.

Master of Unarmed Fighting Style: You are specialized in unarmed attacks. If you are already specialized in unarmed attacks, you instead deal 2 additional points of damage with unarmed attacks. Enabler.

Lethal Damage: When you hit with an unarmed attack, you inflict an additional 5 points of damage. Enabler.



NEVER SAYS DIE

When others are ready to quit, you're just getting started thanks to your resilience, tenacity, and relentless determination to face adversity head-on. Difficulties? They don't faze you because you're not afraid to face hard things.

You probably don't spend a lot of time on your appearance—it is far less important than actions. For that matter, so are words. You're likely not much of a talker. You're a doer.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. You feel the overwhelming need to impress this character, although you're not sure why.
2. Pick one other PC. This character seems quite capable, but in your mind, their spirit needs motivating. You're constantly trying to convince them to keep trying, go the distance, and fight the good fight.
3. Pick one other PC. You feel very protective of this character and don't want to see them harmed.
4. Pick one other PC. They say they've known you for years, but you barely seem to remember them.

Damage track, page 132

Minor Effect Suggestion: You restore 2 points to your Might Pool.

Major Effect Suggestion: Your next action is eased by two steps.

GM intrusion: *Sometimes, it's equipment or weapons that give out.*

TIER 1

Improved Recovery: Your ten-minute recovery roll takes only one action instead, so that your first two recovery rolls are one action, the third is one hour, and the fourth is ten hours. Enabler.

Push on Through (2 Might points): You ignore the effects of terrain while moving for one hour. Enabler.

TIER 2

Tough: You can take punishment beyond what others can. You gain an additional step in your damage track between hale and impaired called hurt. Other than being one step closer to impaired, hurt imposes no changes to your character. Basically, you're sore and bruised, but it's nothing serious. Walk it off. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Stand Like Iron or Hidden Reserves as your tier 3 ability.

Stand Like Iron (4 Might points): The next attack (in the current encounter) that would normally inflict a serious injury on you gives 2 points of Stress instead. Enabler.

Hidden Reserves: When you make a recovery roll, you also gain +1 to both your Might Edge and your Speed Edge for ten minutes thereafter. Enabler.

TIER 4

Outlast the Foe: If you have been in combat for five full rounds, you have an asset for all tasks in the remainder of the combat, and you deal 1 additional point of damage per attack. Enabler.

TIER 5

Not Dead Yet: When you are debilitated, you can still act as though you are impaired. You are still only one step away from death, however. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Final Defiance or Ignore Affliction as your tier 6 ability.

Final Defiance: When you would normally be dead, you instead remain conscious and active for one more round plus one additional round each time you succeed on a difficulty 5 Might task. During these rounds, you are debilitated. If someone (not you) succeeds at a healing task with a difficulty of 5 to tend to your wounds, you remain debilitated. However, while you are in this state, if you move down the damage track to dead again, you cannot be saved. Enabler.

Ignore Affliction (5 Might points): If you are affected by an unwanted condition or affliction (such as disease, paralysis, mind control, broken limb, and so on, but not Stress or moving down the damage track), you can ignore it and act as if it does not affect you for one hour. If the condition would normally last less than an hour, it is entirely negated. Action.

PRACTICALLY LIVES ONLINE

You remember the first time you opened up an internet browser the way other people remember learning to ride a bike. In your family, your group of friends, and at work, you were the internet person and always have been. Whether it involves websites and their coding, social media, searching for information, file sharing, wifi, online games, email, streaming, video chats, message boards, or mobile apps, you know the latest developments, the most current jokes and memes, and all the most important sites.

You probably dress very casually to the point where you wear clothing inappropriate to the situation, such as loose, colorful pajama bottoms to a business meeting. Let's face it, you might go for days without remembering to even look in a mirror.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. You met them online long before you ever met them in real life.
2. Pick one other PC. They claim that you spend too much time online and often encourage you to "touch grass." You'll have to decide if this is charmingly annoying or just annoying.
3. Pick one other PC. They seem to believe that you have used your skills to get their personal information. Are they right? You decide.
4. Pick one other PC. They are fairly unskilled technically and constantly try to get you to fix their computer or explain how something works.

Additional Equipment: You have a top-of-the-line laptop and smartphone. (Most modern characters have a smartphone and maybe a computer; this additional equipment represents especially state-of-the-art items that are out of the price range of the average character.)

Minor Effect Suggestion: Your next attempt to do anything involving computers is eased.

GM intrusions: *Hackers can get hacked. Paying attention to the internet can lead to poor real-life actions or interactions, where you do or say the absolute wrong thing.*

Major Effect Suggestion: Invigorated at how you'll be able to brag about the current situation to your online friends or followers, you restore 1d6 + 1 points to your Intellect Pool immediately.

TIER 1

Online Research (1 Intellect point): All research tasks are eased if you have access to the internet. Enabler.

Tech Skill: You are trained in your choice of one of the following skills: electronics, engineering, programming, or researching. Enabler.

TIER 2

Hacking (3 Intellect points): You can impersonate someone else online. This might allow you access to their information, their funds, and their credit cards, or even allow you to alert the authorities to criminal activities that they (probably didn't) participate in. In a less nefarious hack, you could discover information about them, including their address, daily activities, and current location. This can take anywhere from one minute to many hours, and the task for succeeding is based on both the level of the person and any internet security precautions they might have in place. For example, it might be harder to read someone's emails than to learn their family history, and harder still to get into their bank account. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Online Contacts or Crowdsourcing as your tier 3 ability.

Online Contacts: You have three contacts that you know virtually (but not in real life). Choose an area of expertise for each contact. When you have online access, you can ask them questions about their area of expertise and get an in-depth answer within an hour, and answers for any follow-up questions in another hour. Enabler.

Crowdsourcing (3 Intellect points): You put out a question or request for information online and let others help answer it. If you wait for the information, which can take up to 24 hours, you ease any information-related task (including research, obviously) by two steps. Action to initiate.

TIER 4

Deep Dive (6 Intellect points): By accessing the internet, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible. Action.

TIER 5

Better Hacking (5 Intellect points): If you have electronic access to a system, you can attempt to take control of it. This can include surveillance cameras, security systems, electronic locks, tracking, email (not just of one person, but of entire servers), website backends, databases, and so on. The difficulty of this task is based on the protections the system has in place, but it probably runs from difficulty 3 to difficulty 9. Depending on the situation, this can take one action or hours of work. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Read It Somewhere or Brain Food as your tier 6 ability.

Read It Somewhere (6 Intellect points): With a round's concentration, you call up obscure facts you read somewhere on the internet, easing the task you attempt on the following round by three steps. Action.

Brain Food: You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

RUNS AWAY

You don't always run away, but it's your first instinct. It's saved you more than a few times. Being cautious is the best policy, and you've developed it into something of an art form. If someone is going to put up their defenses, that person is you. Once a new danger is adequately assessed (from a safe perspective), you'll probably deal with it. You're no coward; you just want to be the one to decide when to engage an enemy.

You probably prefer comfortable clothes with neutral tones that allow you to run easily and, if necessary, hide.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. In the recent past, while running away from an active threat, you accidentally left that character to fend for themself. They survived, but just barely. It is up to the player of that character to decide whether they resent you or have decided to forgive you.

2. Pick one other PC. Recently, they accidentally (or perhaps intentionally) put you in a position of danger. You're fine now, but you're wary around that character.

3. Pick one other PC. From your perspective, they seem even more nervous around a specific idea, person, or situation than you do. Through your measured approach to caution, you would like to teach them how to be more comfortable with their fears.

4. Pick one other PC. They are skeptical that you're thoughtful in your caution and chuckle when you explain how being judicious saves lives. They might have even called you a coward once.

Additional Equipment: You have a pair of running shoes that fit perfectly.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You can attempt a stealth task at any point before the end of the next round.

Major Effect Suggestion: You can take an extra action. You can use this action only to move a short distance or to attempt a stealth action, or move an immediate distance and attempt a stealth action.

TIER 1

Go Defensive (1 Intellect point): When you wish, while in combat, you can enter a state of heightened awareness of threat. While in this state, you can't use points from your Intellect Pool, but you gain +1 to your Speed Edge and gain two assets to Speed defense tasks. This effect lasts as long as you wish or until you attack a foe or no combat is taking place within range of your senses. Once the effect of this ability ends, you can't enter it again until after you've made a recovery roll. Enabler.

TIER 2

Enhanced Speed: You gain 3 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

Quick to Flee: You are trained in stealth and gymnastics. Enabler.

Stealth, page 18

Gymnastics, page 17

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Incredible Running Speed or Greater Enhanced Speed as your tier 3 ability.

Incredible Running Speed: You move much farther than normal in a round. This means as a part of another action, you can move up to a long distance. As an action, you can move up to 200 feet (60 m), or up to 500 feet (150 m) with a successful difficulty 4 Speed-based roll. Enabler.

Greater Enhanced Speed: You gain 6 points to your Speed Pool. Enabler.

TIER 4

Increasing Determination: If you fail at a noncombat physical task (pushing open a door or climbing a cliff, for example) and then retry the task, you don't have to apply a level of Effort for retrying as is usually the case, but you still ease the task. If you fail again, you gain no special benefits. Enabler.

Retrying a task after failure, page 120

GM intrusions: *Quick movements sometimes lead to dropped items, slipping on uneven ground, or going the wrong way by accident.*

Quick Wits: When performing a task that would normally require spending points from your Intellect Pool, you can spend points from your Speed Pool instead. Enabler.

TIER 5

Go to Ground (4 Speed points): You move up to a long distance and attempt to hide. When you do, you gain an asset on the stealth task to blend in, disappear, or otherwise escape the senses of everyone previously aware of your presence. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Burst of Escape or Skill With Defense as your tier 6 ability.

Burst of Escape (5 Speed points): You can take two separate actions this round, as long as one of them is to hide or to move in a direction that is not toward a foe. Enabler.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

GM intrusions: *Evidence disappears, red herrings confuse, and witnesses lie. Initial research can be faulty.*

SOLVES MYSTERIES

You are a master of deduction. With a keen eye for detail and a quick wit, you can use a selection of clues to figure out what really happened when others are left scratching their heads. While a character that solves mysteries might be conventionally thought of as a detective, a professor or even a scientist might also be a mystery solver.

You wear sensible clothing and comfortable shoes, walking that fine line between practical and stylish. You might carry a briefcase for all the tools you require to solve mysteries.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. They are the true friend who got you started reading mysteries and detective fiction, which led to your current obsession.
2. Pick one other PC. That character does not seem to trust or like you, but you feel compelled to win them over.
3. Pick one other PC. That character is a good sounding board. After you talk to them for an hour, you gain an asset on any knowledge-based task you are trained in.
4. Pick one other PC. You were rivals with them in some endeavor in the past.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You discover an additional clue about the mystery you are attempting to solve.

Major Effect Suggestion: When you solve a mystery in the presence of the target of your revelation, they are stunned by your dazzling wit, unable to move or act for a round.

TIER 1

Investigate: To solve mysteries, you must engage your mind and body in your deductions. You can spend points from your Might Pool, Speed Pool, or Intellect Pool to apply levels of Effort to any Intellect-based task. Enabler.

Sleuth: Finding the clues is the first step in solving a mystery. You are trained in perception. Enabler.

TIER 2

Out of Harm’s Way: No matter how careful, an investigator sometimes ends up in a scrap. Knowing how to survive is more than half the battle. You are trained in Speed defense tasks. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either You Studied or Skill With Attacks as your tier 3 ability.

You Studied: To be able to put two and two together to reach a deduction, you have to know a few things. You are trained in two areas of knowledge of your choosing (as long as they are not physical actions or combat related) or specialized in one area. Enabler.

Skill With Attacks: Choose one type of attack in which you are not already trained: light bashing, light bladed, light ranged, medium bashing, medium bladed, medium ranged, heavy bashing, heavy bladed, or heavy ranged. You are trained in attacks using that type of weapon. You can select this ability multiple times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of attack. Enabler.

TIER 4

Draw Conclusion (3 Intellect points): After careful observation and investigation (questioning one or more NPCs on a topic, searching an area or a file, and so on) lasting a few minutes, you can learn a pertinent fact if you succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect task. Each additional time you use this ability, the task is hindered by an additional step. The difficulty returns to 3 after you rest for ten hours. Action.

TIER 5

Defuse Situation: During the course of an investigation, your questions sometimes elicit an angry or even violent response. Through dissembling, verbal distraction, or similar evasion (and a successful Intellect attack roll), you prevent a living foe from attacking anyone or anything for one round. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose Seize the Initiative or Greater Skill With Defense as your tier 6 ability.

Seize the Initiative (5 Intellect points): Within one minute of successfully using your Draw Conclusion ability, you can take one additional, immediate action, which you can take out of turn. After using this ability, you can’t use it again until after you rest for ten hours. Enabler.

Greater Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task, even one in which you are already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type, or specialized if you are already trained. You can select this ability up to three times. Each time you select it, you must choose a different type of defense task. Enabler.

> I wanted to forget it, to ignore the dusty crater that waited in the middle of this tiny town, but I couldn’t. Something about it rubbed at me, like a speck of dirt in my eye, but the more I tried to reach it, the deeper it went. I checked maps of the area, looking to see if any of them featured the odd landmark, but I found ones that went right up to 2008, and none of them had anything marked at that spot, even though the split in the road had clearly been there far longer than a year.
>
> I tried to talk about it, see if anyone else had any idea about what the pit was or why it was there, but when I asked around Joe’s—the only diner in town—everyone reacted just like Tommy. Mishearing, misunderstanding or just straight-up ignoring me. It wasn’t even like they seemed deliberately evasive; all their reactions seemed genuine, but no one was able to talk about the pit.
>
> —MAG 97: “We All Ignore the Pit”

WEARS A BADGE

You're an officer of the law. It's a hard job, and one that's often thankless, especially when bad apples among your number abuse their authority. Sometimes the whole system feels rotten but you still take it seriously. It's your job to enforce the law, protect people and property, and keep the peace. Investigating crimes means questioning witnesses and suspects. Often, hard questions are all that's required to get someone to confess. With your badge or warrant card and your commanding presence, you're perfect for the job.

While on duty, you're in uniform, display your badge prominently, and carry self-defense gear on your belt. When off duty, you wear civvies but still usually carry your gear and badge, just in case.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. That character was once a cadet who trained under you (only if they agree they were once in law enforcement), but they've now gone their own way.
2. Pick one other PC. You know they spent several months behind bars, but you're not sure for what.
3. Pick one other PC. They're an old friend who hates the fact that you're a cop and sometimes tries to get you to quit.
4. Pick one other PC. You know there's a warrant for them on record, probably for unpaid parking fines (though you're not sure). You've chosen not to question them about it, but you could change your mind.

Additional Equipment: Police uniform and duty belt (containing handcuffs, radio, holster, and flashlight), a badge, a gun (medium ranged weapon, which you are licensed to carry), and a baton (light melee weapon).

Minor Effect Suggestion: The next time you attempt to command the same foe, the task is eased.

Major Effect Suggestion: The foe either surrenders or is influenced by your ability for twice as long as normal.

Driving, page 16

GM intrusions: *Onlookers react badly to revelation of authority. A higher-priority situation requires the character's immediate attention.*

BADGE OR WARRANT CARD

Having a real badge or warrant card requires ongoing employment by a police department. That said, you could be on a sabbatical, taking a leave from active duty, or simply on vacation for several weeks each year without fear of losing your standing. If your police badge is confiscated for any reason and you use a facsimile to gain the benefit of having a badge, there's a chance that someone will recognize it as a fraud (though most NPCs will be fooled).

TIER 1

Authority: Your air of authority is an asset for all social interactions. However, some people have the opposite reaction, depending on their experience with the police, including criminals and those wrongfully persecuted by the police, hindering your interactions instead. Enabler.

Driver: You are trained in driving. Enabler.

Armed Response: You are practiced with guns and suffer no penalty when using one. Enabler.

TIER 2

Command (3 Intellect points): Calling on your authority as a vested officer of the law, you issue a simple command to one target, who attempts to carry out your command as its next action if you succeed on an Intellect attack. The creature must be within short range and able to understand you. The command can't inflict direct harm on the creature or its allies, so "Stab yourself" won't work, but "Flee" might. In addition, the command can require the creature to take only one action, so "Unlock the door" might work, but "Unlock the door and run through it" won't. A commanded creature can still defend itself normally and return an attack if one is made on it. Action.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Cool Under Fire or Insider as your tier 3 ability.

Cool Under Fire: You are trained in Speed defense tasks. Enabler.

Insider: You have access to information known only to law enforcement. You can obtain information about previous cases and crimes, learn people's identity based on their car license plate, find details of missing persons, and so on. Enabler.

TIER 4

Rapid Attack (3 Speed points): Once per round, you can make an additional attack with your gun. Enabler.

TIER 5

Encouraging Presence (2 Intellect points): For one minute, allies within short range gain an asset on defense rolls. Action.

Skill With Defense: Choose one type of defense task in which you are not already trained: Might, Speed, or Intellect. You are trained in defense tasks of that type. Enabler.

TIER 6

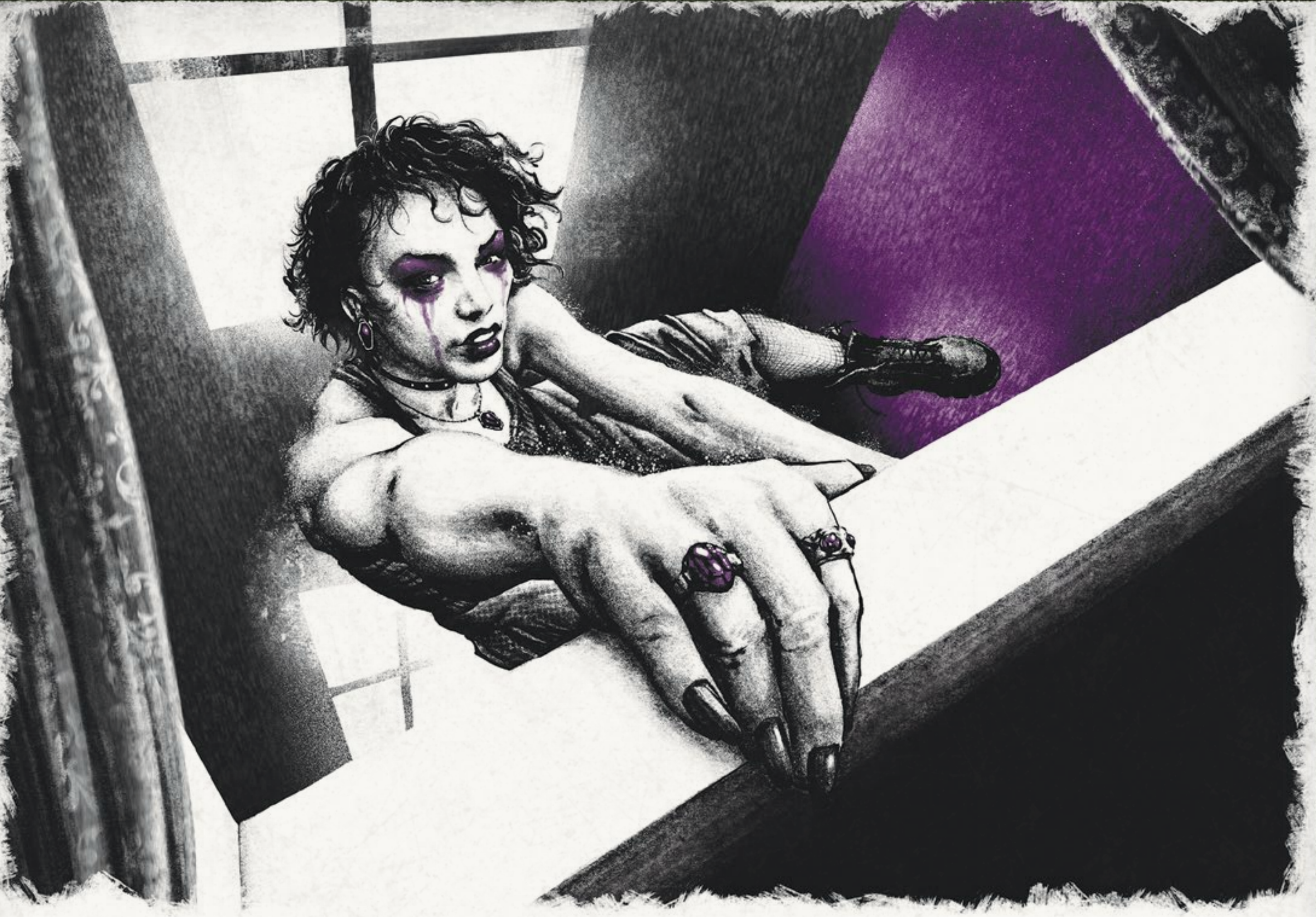
Ability Choice. Choose Greater Enhanced Might or Speed or Close to the Chief as your tier 6 ability.

Greater Enhanced Might or Speed: You gain 6 points to your Might Pool, or 6 points to your Speed Pool, or you can split 6 points between them. Enabler.

Close to the Chief: You're well-respected and liked by the chief of police (or the equivalent). They are not just a contact for information; they'll also give you a lot of leeway should you need to bend or even break the rules. Through the chief, you can get access to virtually any case file in your department or any other, including other agencies (like the FBI, Interpol, and similar). You can also call in backup or assistance and keep their involvement confidential if need be. Enabler.

> I've been looking into Gertrude's arrest. I couldn't get through to Melanie, but Martin managed to find a few details online. Gertrude was arrested for trespassing but released shortly afterwards without being charged. I managed to track down the arresting officer, one J. Rebbicks, who said she'd been found over the body of Gerard Keay, reading from a large, strangely shaped book. They'd been unable to determine if the mutilations on Gerard's body had been done by her, and in the end she somehow talked them out of pressing charges. Officer Rebbicks didn't remember what she'd said, but he did recall that she never returned for the book. It was sitting in evidence for almost a year before, as far as Rebbicks was aware, it simply vanished.
>
> —MAG 107: "Third Degree"

A character who takes advantage of being Close to the Chief is part of the problem, so to speak, because getting special treatment is probably a symptom of corruption.



WORKS THE BACK ALLEYS

The thief, the burglar, the pickpocket: these are the individuals who haunt the back alleys of every community. Whether dangerous or desperate, you've worked as a thief in a city or town, getting by at the expense of the wealthy and unwary. Your talents, however, prepare you for all kinds of pursuits, even when you're not crouching in an alley or climbing into a window.

Usually, you dress to blend in with the crowd. When you're on a mission, black, form-fitting clothing allows you to swim in the shadows.

GM intrusions: *Thieves are thrown in jail. Powerful enemies are made.*

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. The character knew you beforehand and helped you to leave your life of crime for other pursuits—at least temporarily.

2. Pick one other PC. A while back, you attempted to steal from them, but they caught you in the process.

3. Pick one other PC. You never seem to be able to hide so that they can't see you.

4. Pick one other PC. They know your real identity (if it's a secret) or that you work undercover (if it's a secret) and has kept the knowledge to themself so far.

Additional Equipment: You start with a bag of light tools that include lockpicks.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You can immediately attempt to hide after this action.

Major Effect Suggestion: You can immediately take a second action during this turn.

TIER 1

Stealthy: You are trained in your choice of two of the following skills: deception, discerning motive, disguise, lockpicking, pickpocketing, or stealth. You can choose this ability multiple times, but you must select different skills each time. Enabler.

TIER 2

Underworld Contacts: You know many people in a variety of communities who engage in illegal activities. These people are not necessarily your friends and might not be trustworthy, but they recognize you as a peer and may even owe you a favor. You and the GM should work out the details of three or four underworld contacts. Enabler.

Underworld contacts are long-term additions to the campaign, but they are limited to the knowledge and skill sets of the individuals as determined when the ability is gained. The resources made available by I Know a Guy are deliberately more open-ended but also transient.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Pull a Fast One or I Know a Guy as your tier 3 ability.

Pull a Fast One (3 Intellect points): When you're running a con, picking a pocket, fooling or tricking a dupe, sneaking something by a guard, and so on, you gain an asset on the task. Enabler.

I Know a Guy (4 Intellect points): When presented with a difficult challenge that isn't particularly time-sensitive, you can call upon a person you know or have at least heard about that might have a solution. These people are almost always hiding at the edges of society, often as criminals, ex-convicts, or similar folks. Although they could help with any situation, theoretically, the aspects of their help often involve the following:

- Buying or selling illegal or stolen goods
- Getting forgeries made, including fake IDs
- Help breaking into a computer, smartphone, etc.
- Gaining confidential or not publicly available information
- Hiring criminals, including burglars, high-tech thieves, and hitmen

Finding the right person, setting up a meeting with them, and negotiating the terms of the agreement usually takes three to seven days. And of course, they will want to be paid for their services or expect a favor in kind. Enabler.

TIER 4

Master Thief: You are trained in gymnastics and lockpicking. Enabler.

Gymnastics, page 17

Lockpicking, page 17

TIER 5

Dirty Fighter (2 Speed points): You distract, blind, annoy, hamper, or otherwise interfere with a foe, hindering their attacks and defenses for one minute. Action.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose Alley Rat or All-Out Con as your tier 6 ability.

Alley Rat (6 Intellect points): While in a city, you find or create a significant shortcut, secret entrance, or emergency escape route where it looked like none existed. Doing so requires that you succeed on an Intellect action whose difficulty is set by the GM based on the situation. You and the GM should work out the details. Action.

All-Out Con (7 Intellect points): You put everything into it. You add three free levels of Effort to the next task you attempt. You can't use this ability again until after you've taken a ten-hour recovery action. Action.

Effort, page 11

DATE DUE
Amherst
dical
CROIS
PRIVATE
SECURI
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION CARD
POLICE
SISTANT

GM intrusions: *Books burn, get wet, or get lost. Devices break or lose power. Glasses break.*

WOULD RATHER BE READING

Your whole life, people have been asking you why you read so much. Would you rather read about life than live it, they ask? Yes, you answer, probably inwardly. Books are your friends. You love fiction that gives you escape and nonfiction that enriches your mind. You're always learning new things. What's more important than knowledge? Nothing.

You probably carry a bag of books (or a tablet with ebooks, or a phone with audible books on it, or all of these) with you at all times.

Connection: Choose one of the following with your group.

1. Pick one other PC. They seem to understand you and know that you need your space and time alone to read now and again.
2. Pick one other PC. This character gave you a book that became one of your favorites.
3. Pick one other PC. They remind you a lot of the main character of one of your favorite books. You can't help but like them.
4. Pick one other PC. This character borrowed a book and never returned it, and doesn't seem to have a great story as to what happened.

Additional Equipment: You start with a couple of books on the topics of your choice.

Minor Effect Suggestion: You draw on your experiences and ease your next action.

Major Effect Suggestion: The foe is stunned and can't act on their next turn because of an interaction with a book; they slip on it, see it and are too surprised to act, or something else.

TIER 1

Knowledge Is Power: Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

TIER 2

Greater Enhanced Intellect: You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

TIER 3

Ability Choice. Choose either Applying Your Knowledge or Flex Skill as your tier 3 ability.

Applying Your Knowledge: When you help another character undertake any action that you're untrained in, you are treated as if you are trained in it (thus granting two assets to their task instead of one). Action.

Flex Skill: At the beginning of each day, choose one task (other than attacks or defense) on which you will concentrate. For the rest of that day, you're trained in that task. You can't use this ability with a skill in which you're already trained to become specialized. Enabler.

a Quest for
Mr. Spider

TIER 4

Knowledge Is Power: Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

Knowing the Unknown (6 Intellect points): By accessing the resources appropriate to your character, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7. Gaining knowledge of the future is impossible. Action.

TIER 5

Greater Enhanced Intellect: You gain 6 points to your Intellect Pool. Enabler.

TIER 6

Ability Choice. Choose either Tower of Intellect or Credible Hypothesis as your tier 6 ability. Whichever one you choose, you also gain Knowledge Is Power (again).

Tower of Intellect: You are trained in Intellect defense tasks. If you are already trained, you are specialized in those tasks instead. Enabler.

Credible Hypothesis (4 Intellect points): You examine an area and learn precise, useful details about the past (if any exist) if you succeed on a difficulty 3 Intellect-based roll. You can ask the GM up to four questions about the immediate area; each requires its own roll. Action.

Knowledge Is Power: Choose two noncombat skills in which you are not trained. You are trained in those skills. Enabler.

AVATARS

> "Avatar isn't a *thing*, Martin! It's not—It's just a word. A word used by . . . fools like Smirke to try and sort everything into neat little boxes, to reduce the messy spray of human fear into a checklist: human, Avatar, monster, victim."
>
> —Jonathan Sims, MAG 183: "Monument"

The Entities sometimes grant people a modicum of their power and in so doing, increase fear in the world. The chosen recipient of this power is called an Avatar. Each Entity creates (directly or indirectly, depending on the Entity) their own Avatar, and it's entirely possible for an Entity to have more than one Avatar at a time (or no Avatars for a time). The Avatar might not be aware of the implications of the decision, but each makes a conscious choice to accept this "gift." Many Avatars willingly serve the Entity as one might serve a god or highly revered being. Unwilling Avatars find themselves in difficult ethical situations where they have amazing powers at their command, but they know that using those powers furthers the end of a malevolent Entity of fear.

The Entities, page 166

As the concept of an Avatar in The Magnus Archives has no formal definition—at least that humans can comprehend—some Avatars might be seen to break the rules. Some beings that were never mortal humans can be considered Avatars, for example, and can be assumed to have been created as such by the Entities.

To become an Avatar, one must have had a significant paranormal experience (or many such experiences) that affects their mind and perhaps their body as well. While such encounters can lead to a character wielding actual mystical abilities as described in chapter 3, Avatars are a step beyond. They are not merely touched by the supernatural—they are endowed with it, shaped by it. A character must already have at least one supernatural type ability to become an Avatar.

The strangest part of becoming an Avatar is that the person must die and be reborn. For many, this is a metaphorical death meaning something dramatic has to happen to drastically alter their character, either physically or emotionally. Or both.

This means, however, that a character who seemingly dies in the course of the game and who fulfills all the other requirements may return . . . different, their mystical resurrection powered by one of the Entities. This very likely happens only once.

To become an Avatar, a character must meet these requirements:

- Tier 4 or higher
- Has gained, over time, 10 levels of Stress from paranormal experiences
- Possesses at least one supernatural ability from their type
- Died, physically or metaphorically

Avatars must "feed" the Entity that created them or be fed upon by them. This means that if an Avatar does not use their main Avatar power as described below at least once a week, they gain 3 points of Stress, and they continue to gain 3 points of Stress each subsequent day they do not use their power.

POWERS OF AN AVATAR

"Serves as an Avatar" is a sort of additional focus that all Avatars have. Abilities offered are added to the abilities from the character's normal focus.

All Avatars have these abilities:

Sense Avatar: You can identify another Avatar as such if you can perceive them normally and are nearby. This normally requires no roll or action on your part. An Avatar can attempt to hide their status as an Avatar, but you can still use an action to try to identify them with an Intellect-based task. Enabler.

Sense Supernatural Activity (2 Intellect points and 2 Stress): If a supernatural creature, artefact, book, or effect is within immediate range, you can sense its presence. Action.

Avatars also have a power that is specifically related to their Entity, as follows. However, these are mere suggestions; you may have a different idea of where you want your abilities to go. Work with your GM to customize your Entity-specific power in a way that most speaks to your conception of an Avatar. For their part, GMs should feel free to develop ideas encountered here or in the podcast as a jumping-off point to provide additional customization for PCs who have a different idea about their additional Avatar abilities.

THE BURIED

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Claustrophobia (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch is gripped with the sensation that whatever is near them (the walls of the room, the people around them, trees in a forest) is closing in. They feel suffocation is a serious threat. They suffer 3 points of Stress (3 points of damage if an NPC) and 3 more points of Stress (or 3 points of damage) each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them each round. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. Action.

Crushing Debt (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch is immediately targeted by an apparently real debt-collection agency, either by text, email, or direct contact by an agent. The debt seems credible to the affected creature, and they feel ruinous bankruptcy is imminent, with every other problem they have crowding into their mind. They suffer 3 points of Stress (3 points of damage if an NPC) and 3 more points of Stress (or 3 points of damage) each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them each round. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. When the effect ends, the debt collection agency realizes they targeted the character by mistake or stops their attempts to collect the debt for some other reason. Action to initiate.

Drown (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch who is holding some sort of liquid (such as a cup of tea) or who is within immediate range of even a small amount of liquid suffers an unfortunate accident: their tea goes down wrong, they trip and land face-first into a sink or tub, they fall in a river, or they are otherwise assaulted by water that gets into their lungs. They suffer 3 points of Stress (3 points of damage if an NPC) and 3 more points of Stress (or 3 points of damage) each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them each round. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. Action to initiate.

THE CORRUPTION

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Crawling Corruption (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Teeming cockroaches, maggots, or other insects popularly associated with rot burst from a creature's body at the place where you touch them. They suffer a serious injury (or 6 points of damage if an NPC). Action.

Touch of Decay (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): An inanimate object no larger than you that you touch rots and falls apart as if it aged five hundred years in an instant. For example, if the object is wood or cloth, it crumbles to nothing; if it is metal, it likely rusts and corrodes, probably useless; and if it is stone, it might weather a bit, but it changes very little. If you touch a living creature, they suffer a serious injury (or 6 points of damage if an NPC). Action.

Vile Fondness (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch gains a sudden attraction to something most consider vile, such as the infectious disease wing of a hospital or a former lover they previously left for being "toxic." An affected target doesn't immediately drop everything to go find the new object of their affection, though they will as soon as is reasonable given their circumstances. Targets remain newly enamored for about a day, or until they suffer a serious repercussion from their new fondness (such as catching an infectious disease, being gaslit in some obvious and humiliating way, and so on). Action.

THE DARK

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Blinding Touch (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch is blinded for one minute, during which time they suffer 1 point of Stress every few rounds, to a maximum of 3 (3 points of damage if an NPC) from anxiety and/or by accidentally hurting themselves while trying to move without being able to see. Action.

Tough, page 39

Brackish Gloom (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Chill, brackish water pours from you in dark rivulets, creating a small pool of cold, black, salty water on the ground around you. The water doesn't impede you in the slightest, but your foes' attacks against you are hindered by two steps while the water persists (up to ten minutes, or until you end the effect purposefully or by moving more than an immediate distance). Action to initiate.

The Unseen (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Invisible hands reach out of the shadows or from beneath or around nearby objects, attacking up to five different targets. Targets struck are immobilized with cold and terror for the next two rounds. Action.

THE DESOLATION

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Candle Flesh (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Your waxy flesh becomes as warm as a burning candle and just as malleable. You spend this round molding your wounds back into shape and ascend one step on the damage track. Action.

Conflagration (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You summon a burst of heat and flame at a spot near you. Everything within an immediate area of that point suffers 5 points of damage (or a serious injury if it is a PC). Flammable objects may catch on fire. Action.

Fiery Shimmer (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Your skin glows as if it's a thin screen between the world and a raging bonfire for one hour. During that period, you gain an extra step on the damage track (similar to the Tough ability) and are immune to damage from fire or heat. Action.

THE END

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Deathless Avatar (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): If you descend every step on the damage track and die, you come back to life next round on the second-to-last step of the damage track (debilitated) if you have at least 4 Intellect points left in your Intellect Pool, and you spend 4 of them to trigger this ability. Each time you use this ability, reduce your Intellect Pool by 2. Enabler.

The Inevitable (4+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature of level 3 or less that you touch sustains 5 points of damage and 5 more points of damage each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them each round. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. Action.

Skull Visage (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Your visage changes, flashing briefly from normal to that of a terrifying animated skull. Up to five targets you choose who can see you are immobilized with fear of imminent death for the next two rounds if they're affected by your attack. Action.

THE EYE

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Hypercognizance (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You gain exceptional awareness of everything around you for ten minutes. During that period you can see things that are normally invisible, and attacks or other tasks that rely on sight are eased by two steps. Action to initiate.

Modify Memory (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A target within short range you successfully make an Intellect attack against gains a short memory that's not their own, or a piece of information (or disinformation). Alternatively, you can use this ability to insert visual information up to one round in length into recorded surveillance camera footage. Action.

Truth (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You learn a pertinent fact you didn't already know about a nearby creature, no roll needed. Action.

THE FLESH

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Crawling Form (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You disfigure a creature you touch, causing its limbs to fuse together for at least ten minutes, during which time it can't move except by squirming and rolling. Action.

Twisted Form (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You disfigure a creature you touch in a way of your choosing. The change is primarily cosmetic, although it is very painful. The creature suffers 4 points of damage (or a serious injury if a PC). It is possible to use this ability to improve (or at least not worsen) the creature's appearance, but doing so is difficult and requires a full minute of work and an Intellect-based roll on your part with a difficulty of 6. Action (or action to initiate).

Unholy Hunger (4+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature of level 4 or less that you touch takes a hungry bite from their own flesh, taking 3 points of damage and 3 more points of damage each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. Action to initiate.

THE HUNT

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Hairy on the Inside (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): For ten minutes, your form becomes more bestial and you gain +8 to your Might Pool, +1 to your Might Edge, +2 to your Speed Pool, and +1 to your Speed Edge. While this ability is active, you can't spend Intellect points for any reason other than to try to change to your normal form before the ten-minute duration is over (a difficulty 2 task). Action to change; action to change back.

Hunting Scream (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Up to three targets in long range who hear your hunting scream, whistle, song, or other loud utterance who you successfully attack are terrified, freezing in place or running away as fast as they can (your choice) for two rounds. Action.

Stalk and Kill (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You designate a nearby creature as your prey. For the next hour, any task involving finding, following, or attacking your prey is eased. Action.

THE LONELY

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Lonesome crowd, page 225

Call the Crowd (**4 Intellect points and 3 Stress**): You summon a lonesome crowd to a barely populated area within a long distance of yourself. The lonesome crowd acts according to its nature but never targets you as a victim. Usually, the crowd disperses within about ten minutes. Action.

The Fog (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You summon a patch of rolling, heavy fog that fills a very long area for one hour. Visibility in the fog is reduced to immediate range. Action.

Isolation (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch becomes utterly unaware of anyone around them for one hour. They cannot sense other people or creatures in any way, unless another creature spends a few rounds slapping them and calling their name, or until they take damage. Action.

If you attempt to use March to the Pipes to march targets directly to their doom, such as off a cliff, you must make one additional successful roll to compel them onward.

THE SLAUGHTER

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Fatigue of Battle (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A target you touch suddenly recalls a traumatic event they survived in the past (or someone else's event, if they have none). This flare-up lasts about a minute, during which time the range of physical and emotional effects hinders their tasks. They also suffer 1 point of Stress every round or two, to a maximum of 4 (4 points of damage if an NPC). Action.

March to the Pipes (4+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): You produce music (by whistling, singing, or playing an instrument such as bagpipes), causing up to five targets of level 3 or less within long range to move in a regimented fashion in a direction you wish, taking no other actions on their turn. The affected targets continue marching each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the targets by 1. Action to initiate.

The Spirit of War (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature within short range loses themself to rage and, as their next action, attacks the creature nearest to them (not themselves, and if there are no nearer creatures, they attack you). They use whatever means available to inflict the most harm. For every creature near to them that is already engaged in violent action when this takes effect, another round is added to the duration, up to a total of three rounds. Action.

THE SPIRAL

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Door to Elsewhere (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You access a location you know about by causing one door to appear within immediate range and another door to appear at the location you seek. The doors last for one minute or until you use them to move to the new location as another action. If you can't create a door, it could be because the location is protected, you don't know enough about it, or it no longer exists. Action.

Inverted World (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You take control of all the senses of a creature you touch for one minute (six rounds). You make them see, hear, and feel whatever you desire. If the alterations you create are hindering or distracting, their actions are hindered. Otherwise, you can also cause them to suffer 1 point of Stress per round (1 point of damage if they are an NPC) by having them experience something horrific. Action.

Send to the Maze (4+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature of level 3 or less that you touch is banished to the realm of The Spiral for one round, during which time they take 3 points of damage and 3 more points of damage each round as long as you continue to make successful rolls against them. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the level of the target by 1. When the effect ends, the target appears either at the spot from which you banished them, or at a location where you've previously encountered them. Action.

THE STRANGER

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Embracing the Unknown (4+ Intellect points and 3 Stress): All creatures within short range become unable to recognize anyone they see, whether friend or enemy. Nothing will allow them to recognize, distinguish, or remember anyone for one round. For each additional level of Effort you apply, you can increase the duration of this effect by one round. Action.

Monstrous Stranger (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): Your body elongates for one minute, stretching into a long, thin monster with sticklike limbs that have too many joints. In this form, you are practiced in unarmed combat, your unarmed combat attacks deal +2 points of damage, and your unarmed melee attack actions are eased. Action.

Stranger to Pain (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): For one day, you can't be dazed or stunned by physical attacks and are immune to most poisons and diseases. Action.

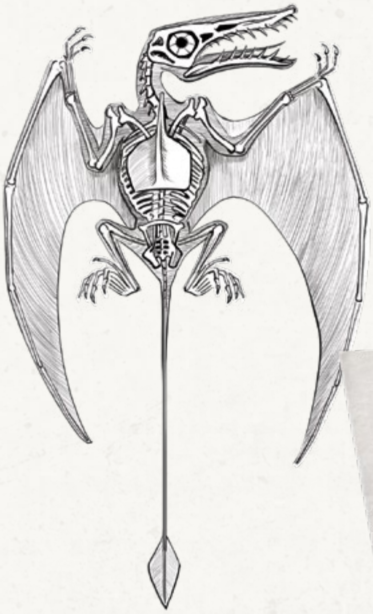
THE VAST

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Hurl Into the Void (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A close creature you designate (one that you can see and can see you) believes they are flung backward and beginning to fall into an infinite abyss. They lose their next action as they struggle and flail about. The experience causes them to suffer 3 points of damage from the shock (3 points of Stress if a PC). Action.

Image of a Colossus (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): A creature you touch is subject to a vision of an unfathomably, terrifyingly large creature in the distance. The terrified target freezes in place or flees as fast as they can (your choice) this round. They remain frozen or keep fleeing as long as you continue to make a successful roll against them each round. You must use your action each round to concentrate on the effect. Action to initiate.

Wings of The Vast (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You are taken up into the sky as suddenly as if plucked into the air by an invisible titan. For the next ten minutes, you can fly a long distance each round. Action.



THE WEB

Choose one ability or customize an ability by working with your GM.

Bewebbed puppet, page 200

Friend to the Bewebbed (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You summon a bewebbed puppet, which appears within a few rounds (as if it had been lingering somewhere nearby) and does your bidding for the next hour, until you dismiss it, or until it is destroyed. Action.

Many-eyed Spies (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): If you want to know what's happening at a location you're familiar with, extra spiders turn up there within the hour. Unless all are found and eliminated, you know what's happening there for the next day. If your eight-legged spies fail to find the location you want to spy on, it could be because the location is protected, you don't know enough about it, or it no longer exists. Action.

Puppet on a String (4 Intellect points and 3 Stress): You silently (psychically) implant a command in the mind of a creature you touch. You designate an event that will trigger the command that can be summarized in a single, short sentence. When the triggering event occurs, the target must carry out the command to the best of their ability. The command can be fairly intricate and require up to 24 hours to complete, but it cannot involve direct harm to the creature or anyone important to them. It also cannot be something obviously impossible for the target to do. Action.

THE EXTINCTION

The Extinction has no Avatars . . . yet.

Avatars must "feed" the Entity that created them or be fed upon by them.

CHAPTER 5

EQUIPMENT

I saw bellows, a wooden box, and a soft and hideous throat that seemed to twist and pucker on its own. Then the Mechanical Turk did something that I do not believe will ever fully leave my thoughts no matter how fervently I might wish it.

It stood up.

It had no legs and made no secret of it, yet still it stood, stepping away from the table that was its very being, and it began to dance. As it did so, the bellows left upon the bleeding table started to pump, and I heard again that mournful wail of Wolfgang's "speech machine" as the end of it flailed and bulged until at last it shrieked its words to the audience. I do not know what it said, and I thank almighty God that I speak no Hungarian.

—MAG 116: "The Show Must Go On"

What equipment do characters begin with, and what else can they get during the game? This chapter addresses those questions.

That said, the equipment listed in this chapter is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive. GMs should feel free to use the various tables, price lists, and examples as a jumping-off point to provide additional options for players. Comparing those prices to what can be found with a quick search of online shops should provide useful comparisons. Anything a regular person can get in the real world should probably also be available to PCs in The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game.

CURRENCY AND PRICES

Dollars, yuan, pounds, pesos, euros, cryptocurrencies of various sorts—lots of different currencies might be used in your game, depending where in the world it's set and where the PCs go. Specifying a single currency isn't important, because we can establish reasonable ranges for equipment prices rather than nailing prices down to the last dollar and cent. Not unlike saying "immediate" or "short" distance rather than giving precise numbers, we talk about goods and services in terms of inexpensive, moderately priced, expensive, very expensive, exorbitant, or priceless items.

If a GM really wants to, they can assign specific value ranges for each price category. For example, an inexpensive item might be £8/$10, a moderately priced item around £80/$100, and so on, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate. The exact amount varies depending on country, inflation, and local circumstances.

To keep things simple, the GM can use the price categories described here to determine PC resources. Only indicate a particular currency (pounds, pesos, dollars, or whatever the GM is most familiar with) as flavor now and then. For example, if PCs working for a paranormal institute are given a discretionary fund to purchase equipment for an especially important mission, their supervisor might caution them to "keep it under a few thousand to keep the bean counters happy." That, depending on how you translate it to the price categories, might allow the PCs to choose three additional expensive items for their mission.

PRICE CATEGORIES

There are six price categories for goods and services.

An **inexpensive item** is something that common people buy. A simple meal or a drink in the bar. A pen and some paper. A book or magazine.

A **moderately priced** item is something that common people buy, but not too often and not in great quantities. A small piece of furniture. A major entertainment. An expensive meal. A new outfit.

An **expensive item** is something that would strain a common person's finances. Rent on a simple apartment. A major piece of furniture. A very nice outfit. The cost to travel a long distance (if appropriate to the setting).

A **very expensive item** is probably out of the reach of most people except in very special circumstances. Jewelry. Luxury furnishings. Non-luxury vehicles.

An **exorbitant item** is something only the very rich can afford. A very nice house. A ship. Extremely expensive jewelry or art.

A **priceless item** is one that even the very rich can't afford, requiring the resources of a multinational corporation or nation-state to acquire or build.

Think of the escalating categories as powers of 10. That is to say, a moderately priced item is ten times more costly than an inexpensive item. An expensive item is ten times more costly than a moderately priced item, and thus 100 times the cost of something inexpensive. A very expensive item is ten times the cost of an expensive one, 100 times the cost of a moderate one, and 1,000 times the cost of an inexpensive one. An exorbitant item is priced ten times beyond that.

USING THE PRICE CATEGORIES

Regardless of how precise you want to be with prices and currency, price categories are useful in a variety of ways.

It's easy for a GM to tell the players to use the guidance presented under PC Starting Equipment to get things rolling, which includes guidance for "two moderately priced items." The player can look on the list and pick two moderately priced items without worrying about their cost. Plus, this approach makes it clear that they get two items, not twenty inexpensive items or one expensive item that perhaps would not be appropriate for a starting character. The categories make it easy to lump similar items together.

The GM can also say "You can have whatever inexpensive items you want, and don't worry about the cost." At higher tiers, when the PCs have more wealth, authority in their organization, and so on, the GM can do this with moderate or even expensive items. This allows the group to skip over playing through a shopping trip to get supplies, and players don't have to track prices down to the last coin.

Finally, the categories can be shorthand when evaluating valuable objects (of a non-paranormal sort) that PCs find during the course of their investigations, and in resolving other story-based expenses that crop up in the game without dealing in the minutiae of exact prices.

PC STARTING EQUIPMENT

A character's starting equipment is nearly as important as their starting skills and abilities.

Every character starts with appropriate clothing, three expensive items, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items. They very likely have access (at home, for example) to up to ten useful inexpensive items.

STARTING PC SAMPLE EQUIPMENT

A character might have the following starting equipment.

Basic Equipment: Everyday clothing, purse or wallet, smartphone, and multitool. Easy access (in car, apartment, home, office, etc.) to the following: flashlight, gloves, journal and pen, handful of energy bars, duct tape, case of light tools.

Provided by Organization: Vehicle (for entire group), laptop, briefcase.

PC MONEY AND INCOME

The price categories suggest that this game isn't about money. Characters working for the Magnus Institute or a similar organization likely don't get paid too much. Assume that, after paying for monthly expenses and whatnot, an average PC earns enough to purchase four moderately priced items in a month.

Similarly, the average PC has enough in savings to purchase a single expensive item, and enough credit to purchase three such items. However, a character with zero savings and maxed out credit cards will very likely regret it later.

EQUIPMENT LEVEL

Mundane equipment is about level 4—less if of inferior quality or materials, more if of superior quality or materials.

If a PC works for an organization, that body might provide additional items to the character on a case-by-case basis, or a stipend they can use to buy additional items.

WEAPONS

The Magnus Archives RPG is not a game about weapons and combat, even if it is, as Jonny would put it, "surprisingly easy to pick up an axe in central London." PCs who regularly engage in combat probably don't last very long. Even more important, shooting one's way out of a situation isn't very appropriate to the types of stories being told in this game.

Not all characters are familiar with all weapons. Protectors know their way around most varieties, but Investigators, Elocutionists, and Occultists prefer light or medium weapons, assuming they pick up a weapon at all.

Unfamiliarity: If a character uses a weapon they have no experience with, an attack with that weapon is hindered. Having experience with a weapon is called being practiced with the weapon.

WEAPON CATEGORIES

Many of the weapon examples noted below can also be found on the equipment list.

Improvised weapons—like kitchen pans, umbrellas, keys, big flashlights, and so on—are light weapons, but most people are not practiced with them, so an attack with an improvised weapon is not eased.

Most thrown weapons, such as throwing knives or explosives, can be thrown a short distance.

Light weapons inflict only 2 points of damage, but attacks with them are eased because they are fast and easy to use. Light weapons include unarmed strikes (punches, kicks, elbows, etc.), knives, batons, slingshots, very small pistols, and so on. Weapons that are particularly small are light weapons.

Medium weapons inflict 4 points of damage. Medium weapons include bows, typical handguns, light rifles, sawed-off shotguns, hand axes, and so on. Most weapons are medium. Anything that could be used in one hand is a medium weapon.

Tough, page 39 and 78

Heavy weapons inflict 6 points of damage, and you must use two hands to attack with them. Heavy weapons are rifles, regular shotguns, large-caliber handguns, katanas, and so on. Anything that must be used in two hands is a heavy weapon.

Any weapon's listed damage is only used to determine the damage inflicted on creatures and NPCs by PCs. PCs don't take damage—they suffer Stress and serious injuries determined by their attacker's level or damage rating.

Weapon	Damage
Light	2 points (attack eased)
Medium	4 points
Heavy	6 points (two hands needed)

Keep in mind that in many locations, it's not acceptable to run around carrying dangerous weapons, at least not without proper licenses and authorization, and sometimes not even then. This is especially true if your game is set in the UK!

EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

Generally speaking, PCs in this game are unlikely to gain access to grenades and similar explosives, at least normally.

But in the corner case where they do, sticks of dynamite, grenades, and other explosives operate differently than other weapons. They affect all targets within an area (usually an immediate area) and inflict damage to all of them. A separate attack roll is required for each target (or a Speed defense roll if the PCs are the targets of such an attack), although to simplify, the player can make one attack roll and compare it to the difficulty to attack each target. The downside of simplifying is that one bad roll means none of the targets are fully affected. Usually, even if the attack roll fails, the targets still suffer a smaller amount of damage, often 1 point. (PCs subject to such a weapon take a serious injury, and even if they succeed on a Speed defense roll, they take 1 point of Stress.)

Explosives like grenades can be thrown a short distance. Otherwise, another launcher weapon is needed to project them a long distance (or farther).

ARMOR

PCs in this game are not kitted out with military vests or police Kevlar. If they do get hold of such gear, treat those wearing it as though they had an extra step in their damage track, similar to the Tough ability (available to Protectors and with the Never Says Die focus). All of their Speed-based tasks, however, are hindered, and the armor does not apply in some situations that might otherwise cause serious injury, such as falling or fire.

WEAPONS AND THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES

Just because your character *could* use a particular weapon doesn't mean they necessarily have one when the game begins. For instance, your Investigator could theoretically wield a light weapon—such as a baton or improvised chair leg, or maybe even a light pistol—when the chips are down. But prior to the game's start, they probably didn't have any, unless their background specifically indicates otherwise.

Lack of weapons is all the more likely if the game is set in a place like the United Kingdom, which has starkly contrasting approaches to weapons and firearms than, say, the United States.

In the UK, guns are heavily regulated through stringent licensing, background checks, and storage protocols. Other weapons are similarly restricted. For instance, batons are usually only allowed for police officers, and knives are only legal if they have nonlocking blades of less than 3 inches (8 cm). Which means that characters who want to acquire a firearm need to go through the requisite process to gain one legally, or find a way to get one illegally. Either way, a character with a weapon would want to keep it under wraps, lest they draw attention from both the general public and officers of the law.

All that said, if a character whose game is set in the UK is a Protector or might otherwise be expected to have access to a weapon, work with the GM to come up with a solution. The GM will guide you on where they'd like to see their game go.

Civilian gun ownership is allowed much more broadly in the United States. Though regulated, firearms are far more common, as are other weapons such as knives and batons. Of course, that doesn't mean a starting Magnus Archives character in the USA begins with a weapon either. But they might, and if they don't, they'll find acquiring and carrying one much easier.

MISCELLANEOUS SERVICES

Although the types of items for sale vary greatly depending on whether the PCs are in a small town or a large city, a few services can usually always be found, like food and lodging. However, these services can span the price categories.

Food: You can get an inexpensive meal, a moderately priced meal, an expensive meal, and so on, depending on the restaurant. An inexpensive meal is light and probably not very nutritious. An expensive meal is available only in nice restaurants in certain locations. An exorbitant meal is probably a feast for a crowd, with the finest foods and drink available.

Lodging: Nightly lodging is similar, although the bottom end starts out worse. An inexpensive night's lodging is probably a youth hostel filled with other guests. Typical lodging (a private room with a decent bed) is probably in the moderately priced range. Very expensive lodging might be a suite of rooms with delicious meals and personal services (such as massages and grooming) included.

Repairs: The cost to repair a damaged item is one category lower than the item's value.

The price categories are, by definition, very broad. Items in the same category can technically be priced quite differently in actual currency, but don't worry about such things in this game. It's also possible that the PCs find a discounted item that is a price category lower than normal or an extremely fancy one in the range of a category higher. But these can be part of the ongoing story and are not part of the base assumptions in this chapter.

> I remember, it was as I began to talk about the Justice, the fifth age of man, that I saw it. It was a mask, a theatre mask, not one of the happy/sad ones you might associate with the stage, but like an old Greek chorus mask: neutral, with a faint aspect of mourning about the mouth and eyes. It sat on the top of a thick black cloak, draped to completely cover whoever might be wearing the mask. But I knew it was empty. It was a hollow shape of a man that had no life, no presence to it. And I saw it in the middle of the third row, as clearly as if it were lit by a second spotlight.
>
> —MAG 108: "Monologue"

EQUIPMENT BY PRICE CATEGORY

The following items (and anything else appropriate to the real world) are usually available.

INEXPENSIVE ITEMS

Weapons	Notes
Ammo (box of 50 rounds)	
Knife	Light weapon (prone to breaking)
Pepper spray	Immediate range, hinders target's tasks for one round

Other Items	Notes
Car or rideshare fare	
Duct tape roll	Useful and ubiquitous
Energy bars, handful	Feeds a person for one day
Flashlight	
Gloves	
Journal and pen	
Lockpick set	Asset for lockpicking tasks
Multitool	
Padlock with keys	
Purse	
Secure briefcase	Level 5 lock
Sunglasses	
Thrift clothing	
Wallet	

MODERATELY PRICED ITEMS

Weapons	Notes
Baton/nightstick	Light weapon
Hand axe	Medium weapon
Hunting knife	Light weapon
Machete	Medium weapon
Slingshot	Light weapon, medium range

Other Items	Notes
Backpack	
Bee suit	Prevents wasp and bee stings
Binoculars	Asset for perception tasks at range
Bolt cutters	
Budget cell phone	
Case of heavy tools	Suitable for plumbing, electrical work, construction, and similar
Case of light tools	Suitable for electronic repair, watch repair, lockpicking, and similar

MODERATELY PRICED ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Other Items	**Notes**
Chainsaw	
Climbing gear	Asset for climbing tasks
Crowbar	
Digital audio recorder	
Disguise kit	Asset for disguise tasks
Electric lantern	
EMF detector	
Everyday clothing	
First aid kit	Asset for healing tasks
Handcuffs	Level 5
Professional clothing	
Rope	Nylon, 50 feet (16 m)
Sleeping bag	
Survival kit	Includes emergency blanket, 2 flares, flashlight, 50-ft. (16 m) rope, rubber gloves, sewing kit, cheap knife
Tent	
Train ticket	

EXPENSIVE ITEMS

Weapons	**Notes**
Bow	Medium weapon, long range
Extendable baton	Light weapon, collapses to size ideal for a pocket/purse
Handgun	Medium weapon, long range
Pocket handgun	Light weapon, short range
Rifle	Medium weapon, long range
Shotgun	Heavy weapon, immediate range
Sawed-off shotgun	Medium weapon, immediate range (can be used one-handed)

Other Items	**Notes**
Airline ticket	
Camera designed to be concealed	Transmits over wifi
Cold weather camping gear	
Hazmat suit (with respirator)	
Laptop	
Microphone designed to be concealed	Transmits over wifi
Nightvision goggles	See in darkness, but perception tasks are hindered
Scuba gear	
Smartphone	
Straightjacket	
Stylish clothing	

Those carrying a sawed-off shotgun should be warned that in almost any jurisdiction, the weapon is illegal, and having one could be punished by a few years in prison.

VERY EXPENSIVE ITEMS

Weapons	Notes
Assault rifle	Heavy weapon, rapid-fire weapon, long range
Heavy rifle	Heavy weapon, 300-foot (90 m) range
Katana	
Large-caliber handgun	Heavy weapon, long range
Submachine gun	Medium weapon, rapid-fire weapon, short range

Other Items	Notes
Designer/bespoke clothing	
Modest vehicle	Level 3
Small boat	Level 3

EXORBITANT ITEMS

Other Items	Notes
Luxury vehicle	Level 5 or 6
Private plane	Level 5
Yacht	Level 5

PRICELESS ITEMS

Other Items	Notes
Orbital space station	Useful for running experiments in weightless, isolated environments

GLOCK
26
AUSTRIA
9x19

CHAPTER 6

CYPHERS

Benoît was leaning over the bar, listening to a young man who, I believe, was ordering for quite a large group. As this customer listed off his drinks, Benoît's hand rested lightly upon the countertop, and I found, for no reason I could readily provide, my gaze was resting upon the fingers of his hand.

Without any warning, or reaction from Benoît himself, there seemed to be movement from the ring finger of his right hand. A slight shudder, a shifting of the skin beneath his fingernail. A small patch of darkness seemed to grow just below it, expanding until it resolved itself into the shape of an insect. It pushed itself smoothly and quickly out from below his fingernail and dropped down onto the bar, scuttling away and out of sight so quickly I lost it almost immediately. It had all happened in a matter of moments, and there was no blood, no reaction from Benoît, no evidence that it had truly happened at all, apart from my shaking legs and the feeling I was going to collapse.

—MAG 102: "Nesting Instinct"

In addition to the resources available to a character based on their type or their focus—abilities that are always available and expected—PCs have access to a small number of abilities that are ephemeral and transitory. Called cyphers, these abilities represent luck, momentary inspiration, desperation, machinations of The Web, or, more broadly, the ineffable influence of all the dread powers at work. They can grant a PC a useful power that can restore them, inspire a new plan or direction, ease tasks, and more.

Because cyphers are driven by happenstance and the heat of the moment, characters don't choose them. The GM—representing fate, in this process—assigns them to the PCs. But as this happens between moments of action or drama, when the PCs are resting, the players also have a hand in directing the narrative that cyphers affect. This is because the player chooses when to use a cypher, and which one they use. Characters have a cypher limit that increases as they advance, representing the maximum number of cyphers at their disposal.

Regardless of what they do, cyphers are single-use effects and are always lost when used. Unless a cypher's description says otherwise, it works only for the character who activates it. Cyphers represent a character's personal luck or inspiration.

Cyphers are a game mechanic designed for frequent use and replenishment. PCs can have only a small number of cyphers at any given

Cyphers lead to fun game moments where a player can say "Well, I've got an X that might help in this situation," and X is always different. Cyphers keep the game fresh and interesting.

time, and since it's easy to get more, they're encouraged to use them at a steady pace.

In theory, the cyphers gained by the PCs are determined randomly. However, the GM can also choose them deliberately.

GAINING AND REPLENISHING CYPHERS

Characters start with a full complement of cyphers, up to their limit. Once a cypher "slot" is freed up because a cypher is used, the character can gain a new one by resting. The rest must be at least ten minutes, but it can be the same rest used to recover points in a Pool or to reduce Stress. Normally this can only be done once a day (once between their ten-hour rests), so players might choose to wait until they have more than one slot free for new cyphers for maximum benefit.

Instead, the GM could choose significant points in the story when new cyphers might simply come unbidden to the PCs. Everyone could get a new cypher in the wake of a major discovery or success, or to help compensate them after a harrowing ordeal.

Cyphers don't have to be used to make room for new ones. A character can use an action to flush a cypher, freeing up space to acquire one later. Once a cypher is discarded, it is gone and can't be immediately regained.

USING CYPHERS

Most cyphers take one action to activate, just like any other ability. However, some cyphers are marked "instant" and can be used as part of another action or even when the PC is reacting to another character's action, such as when the PC is attacked.

Cyphers can be used automatically; they don't require a roll for the PC to gain their benefit because most cyphers only affect the PC. However, if a cypher does affect a target, the action to use it is Intellect based unless described otherwise. For example, using the breathing room cypher could be Speed based if the PC describes their action as quickly knocking whatever the target is holding from their hands.

Once a cypher is activated, if it has an ongoing effect, that effect applies only to the character who activated the cypher.

CYPHERS LEVELS AND EFFECTS

All cyphers have a level and an effect. The level sometimes determines an aspect of the cypher's power (how long it lasts, for example), but otherwise it only determines the general efficacy, the way level works with anything else. The Level entry for a cypher is usually a die roll, sometimes with a modifier, such as 1d6 or 1d6 + 4. The GM can roll to determine the cypher's level or can allow the player to roll when they receive the cypher.

CYPHER TABLE

d00	Cypher
01–02	Another twist (instant)
03–04	Big picture
05–06	Binary (instant)
07	Body builder
08–09	Breathing room (instant)
10–11	Burning desire (instant)
12–13	Cheating death (instant)
14–15	Curiosity
16–17	Dance through the maze
18–19	Deathly silent and still (instant)
20–21	Desperate effort (instant)
22–23	Eye contact (instant)
24–25	Flee The Hunt! (Instant)
26–27	Gift of The Piper (Instant)
28–29	Guess you had to be there
30–31	Gut feeling
32–33	Hard shoulder (instant)
34–35	Help from a stranger
36–37	Implore The Flesh
38–39	Jigsaw solver
40–41	Last words
42–43	Learn from The Web
44–45	Lesson of The Boneturner
46–47	Librarian's pupil
48–49	Like an Avatar (instant)
50–51	Meat
52–53	Nemesis
54–55	Nightfall
56–57	Observer effect
58–59	Of The Beholding
60–61	Of The Flesh
62–63	Panopticon (instant)
64–65	Personal space
66–67	Risen wind
68–69	Sculptor's tool (instant)
70–71	Show must go on
72–73	Smell of blood (instant)
74	Spiral's luck (instant)
75–76	Squirm (instant)
77–78	Stare into The Vast
79–80	Strange music
81–82	Taking stock
83–84	Thought for the day
85–86	Thrill of the chase
87–88	Tightrope
89–90	Uncanny valley (instant)
91–92	Watcher's know-how
93	Weaver's encouragement
94–95	Well-being
96–97	What we all ignore
98–99	What we lose (instant)
00	Words of the puppeteer (instant)

CYPHER LIST

ANOTHER TWIST (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Important problems require elevated focus. One die roll of your choosing gets rerolled.

BIG PICTURE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Everything seems more vivid. For one hour per cypher level, you know when any movement occurs within short range and when large creatures or objects move within long range. You also know the number and size of the creatures or objects in motion.

BINARY (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 2

You correctly guess the PIN code allowing access to a phone, door lock, debit card, and so on, or you guess the alphanumeric passcode for a laptop, website, or similar situation, as long as the level of the object or program is equal to or less than this cypher's level.

BODY BUILDER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Drawing on your inner reserves, you add 1 to your Might Edge for one hour (or 2 if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

BREATHING ROOM (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 1

As part of a physical action on your part (an attack, an "accidental" bump, a startling shout, pushing by on the way to somewhere else, etc.), you force an NPC within immediate range whose level is lower than this cypher's level to drop whatever they are holding.

BURNING DESIRE (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

This particular predicament allows you to use 1 level of Stress as an asset on your action without incurring a GM intrusion, as normally happens.

Using Stress, page 129

Damage track, page 132

CHEATING DEATH (INSTANT)

Level: 10

The circumstances were horrific but not fatal. If you reach the last step on the damage track, you go into a near-death coma for a week rather than dying. You have a serious scar even after you recover.

CURIOSITY

Level: 1d6 + 2

You reflect on excellence, adding 1 to your Intellect Edge for one hour (or 2 if this cypher's level is 5 or higher).

DANCE THROUGH THE MAZE

Level: 1d6

If you can imagine it, you can become it. All your tasks involving manual dexterity—such as pickpocketing, lockpicking, juggling, operating on a patient, defusing a bomb, and so on—are eased by one step for one hour, or two steps for one hour if this cypher's level is 5 or higher.

DEATHLY SILENT AND STILL (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

You hide so well (assuming there is some way to conceal yourself) that absolutely no one is aware of you for one round.

DESPERATE EFFORT (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

You're in the flow, gaining one free level of Effort to one task without spending points from a Pool. The level of Effort provided by this cypher does not count toward the maximum amount of Effort you can normally apply to one task.

EYE CONTACT (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 4

You convey simple information to a known ally who can see you using only expression, gestures, or references (such as a line from a movie). Only you and your ally understand what is being communicated—or really, that anything is being communicated at all. The limit of the "message" is about one word per level of the cypher.

FLEE THE HUNT! (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

If you're being chased, you get away. The pursuer eventually gives up (based on the circumstances). However, if the pursuer is given the opportunity—such as you returning—they may give chase again, and this time it is resolved normally.

GIFT OF THE PIPER (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Seeing your chance, you take an immediate additional action on your turn.

GUESS YOU HAD TO BE THERE

Level: 1d6

You recall any one experience you've ever had. The experience can be no longer than one minute per cypher level, but the recall is perfect, so (for example) if you saw someone dial a phone, you remember the number.

GUT FEELING

Level: 1d6 + 4

When faced with a choice between two known options, you pick the most correct one based on the circumstances. If you're following someone who gives you the slip, you get a gut feeling (provided by the GM) if they turned left or right. If you have to cut the red wire or the green wire to defuse a bomb, you choose the right one. If you're trying to solve a murder and you've narrowed the suspect list down to two, you identify the killer. The gut feeling doesn't work if neither of the two choices is the correct one.

HARD SHOULDER (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 4

Skill or blind luck allows you to avoid a single attack from your attacker if their level is lower than the cypher's level. You suffer no damage or effect.

HELP FROM A STRANGER

Level: 1d6

You suddenly remember that you brought—or were given—a necessary item not recorded on your character sheet. Alternatively, you know how to cobble together a makeshift replacement for the needed item in a minute's time, using materials at hand. (Choose whichever fits the situation better.)

IMPLORE THE FLESH

Level: 1d6 + 2

Rolling your shoulders and centering your breath, you regain a number of points equal to this cypher's level to your Speed Pool.

JIGSAW SOLVER

Level: 1d6

Hardly anything gets past you. All your tasks involving intelligent deduction—such as playing chess, inferring a connection between clues, solving a mathematical problem, finding a bug in computer code, and so on—are eased by two steps for one hour.

LAST WORDS

Level: 1d6

If you spend a minute or so speaking to nearby allies, talking about the importance of what you're about to attempt, how strength comes from unity, how everyone working together creates something greater than its parts, and similar themes, you and your allies lose Stress in an amount equal to the cypher level.

LEARN FROM THE WEB

Level: 1d6

Sometimes all it takes is focus. For the next day, you are effectively trained in a predetermined skill (or two skills if this cypher's level is 5 or higher). The skill could be anything (including something specific to the operation of a particular device), or roll a d00 to choose a common skill.

d00	Result
01–10	Melee attacks
11–20	Ranged attacks
21–40	One type of academic or esoteric lore (biology, history, occultism, and so on)
41–50	Researching
51–60	Forensics
61–70	Persuasion
71–75	Mechanics
76–80	Speed defense
81–85	Intellect defense
86–90	Swimming
91–95	Psychology
96–00	Stealth

LESSON OF THE BONETURNER

Level: 10

If you reach the second-to-last step on the damage track (debilitated) and survive the experience, you find renewed purpose during your recovery. When you're hale again, you gain a character advancement step—skill training, +4 points to add to your Pools, +1 to Effort, or +1 to Edge—without having to spend 4 XP.

Character advancement, page 140

LIBRARIAN'S PUPIL

Level: 1d6

You are dramatically but temporarily inspired, allowing you to ease one specific kind of physical action by three steps. Once activated, this boost can be used a number of times equal to the cypher level, but only within a twenty-four-hour period. The boost takes effect each time the action is performed. For example, a level 3 cypher boosts the first three times that action is attempted. Roll a d00 to determine the action.

d00	Result
01–15	Melee attack
16–30	Ranged attack
31–40	Speed defense
41–50	Might defense
51–60	Intellect defense
61–68	Gymnastics
69–76	Endurance
77–84	Driving
85–92	Equipment operation
93–94	Stealth
95–96	Initiative
97–98	Perception
99	Performance
00	Tracking

LIKE AN AVATAR (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 2

Sometimes everything falls perfectly into place. Treat your action as if you had rolled a natural 20.

MEAT

Level: 1d6

You psych yourself up, reducing the Stress you suffer from physical injury by 1 for one hour per cypher level. You still suffer Stress from mental shock or despair normally.

NEMESIS

Level: 1d6 + 1

Your actions and/or words are especially startling. One NPC within immediate range whose level is lower than the cypher level decides to leave, using their next five rounds to move away quickly.

NIGHTFALL

Level: 1d6

Determined to keep going, you use senses other than sight to get by for one hour per cypher level. You aren't hindered on tasks to perceive or attack in dark conditions.

OBSERVER EFFECT

Level: 1d6

When you look around an immediate area, if there are any hidden clues significant to the current investigation, you notice them.

OF THE BEHOLDING

Level: 1d6

Feeling especially alert, you have an asset to perception tasks for one hour per cypher level.

OF THE FLESH

Level: 1d6

Your body embraces fight instead of flight. All your noncombat tasks involving raw strength—such as breaking down a door, lifting a heavy boulder, forcing open elevator doors, competing in a weightlifting competition, and so on—are eased by two steps for one hour.

PANOPTICON (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Fear is a great motivator. You memorize everything you see for thirty seconds per cypher level and store what you see permanently in your long-term memory. This cypher is useful for watching someone pick a specific lock, enter a complex code, or do something else that happens quickly.

PERSONAL SPACE

Level: 1d6 + 4

Flinching isn't always bad. For the next day, you have an asset to Speed defense rolls.

RISEN WIND

Level: 1d6 + 2

You catch your second wind, regaining a number of points equal to this cypher's level to your Might Pool.

SCULPTOR'S TOOL (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

The tool feels so comfortable in your hand that you have an additional asset for any one task using it, even if that means exceeding the normal limit of two assets.

SHOW MUST GO ON

Level: 1d6

You spot an untended ladder, hard hat, clipboard and pen, cleaning cart and apron, or whatever is appropriate to the circumstances that, once obtained, allow you and up to two allies to slip into a building without drawing attention. If your entrance is challenged by guards or others monitoring the area, you and your allies' disguise and/or associated deception tasks are eased by two steps. The benefits of this cypher usually last for several hours.

SMELL OF BLOOD (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Outraged, inspired, or fueled by desperate need, your attack deals extra damage equal to this cypher's level.

SPIRAL'S LUCK (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Luck sometimes swings your way, and an attack that would normally inflict a serious injury on you gives 2 points of Stress instead.

SQUIRM (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

An adrenaline jolt eases the action you are taking by three steps.

STARE INTO THE VAST

Level: 1d6 + 2

Stilling your racing thoughts, you regain a number of points equal to this cypher's level to your Intellect Pool.

STRANGE MUSIC

Level: 1d6

You take a moment to center yourself, and you lose an amount of Stress equal to this cypher's level.

TAKING STOCK

Level: 1d6 + 2

Putting together subtle clues and things you've seen and learned, you can ask the GM one question and get a general answer. The GM assigns a level to the question, so the more obscure the answer, the more difficult the task. Generally, knowledge that you could find by looking somewhere other than your current location is level 1, and obscure knowledge of the past is level 7.

Gaining knowledge of the future is level 10, and such knowledge is always open to interpretation. A taking stock cypher cannot provide an answer to a question above its level.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Level: 1d6

You remember a pertinent detail regarding the current situation. The detail must be something that can be learned by normal research.

THRILL OF THE CHASE

Level: 1d6

The situation demands haste. For one minute, you can move a long distance instead of a short distance as an action.

TIGHTROPE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Galvanized by your plight, you add 1 to your Speed Edge for one hour (or 2 if the cypher is level 5 or higher).

UNCANNY VALLEY (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 3

After talking with someone for at least a couple of rounds, you have a better understanding of what they would need to hear to find your deception or persuasion more believable and/or credible, easing a deception or persuasion task by three steps.

WATCHER'S KNOW-HOW

Level: 1d6

You know where to look or who to ask to find a significant piece of information. The GM might provide multiple options. This can be used when you start research or while you're searching for clues. For example, if you want to know if anyone's been in an apartment in the past 24 hours, the GM might say that you can look at the carpet to see if it's trodden upon, or that you can speak to the building manager to view the footage from the security cameras in the hallway.

WEAVER'S ENCOURAGEMENT

Level: 1d6

Your encouraging words and presence motivate someone next to you, granting them an asset on their next task. You encourage up to three characters at once if this cypher's level is 5 or higher.

WELL-BEING

Level: 1d6

You're jacked up on a cocktail of fear and adrenaline. For one round per cypher level, you can act as if one step higher on the damage track than you actually are, as long as you are not dead.

Damage track, page 132

WHAT WE ALL IGNORE

Level: 1d6

Determined not to let things get to you, for one hour per cypher level, you reduce the Stress you suffer from mental shock or despair by 1 each time it occurs. You still suffer Stress from physical injury normally.

WHAT WE LOSE (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6 + 3

You brush past someone, coming away with something from their pocket, bag, or other container, assuming they're carrying anything. This cypher eases a pickpocketing task by two steps, or four steps if the cypher is level 7 or higher.

WORDS OF THE PUPPETEER (INSTANT)

Level: 1d6

Determined not to fail, you gain an additional asset for any one task involving verbal interaction, even if that means exceeding the normal limit of two assets.

> `It was dark inside, lit only by what spilled in through the open doorway. I could hear a sound like the turning of an old film reel, but I couldn't say where from. I stood there, unable to step inside, not because of fear, but because the space inside was threaded all over with film strips. Up and down, one side to the other, wrapping around and through each other. I gingerly reached out and touched one and, as I did, Dexter seemed to emerge from the darkness. At first, I thought he was taller than usual, but then I realized that he was suspended, ever so slightly, by the strips of film, his feet a good couple of inches off the floor. He was very calm as he asked what I wanted, and when I stutteringly explained the situation, he just nodded and said we should feel free to rearrange however we liked. Then he closed the door and I left, trying very hard to convince myself that he had only had two arms.`
>
> `—MAG 110: "Creature Feature"`

CHAPTER 7

RULES OF THE GAME

> I itch all the time. Deep beneath my skin, where the bone sits, enshrined in flesh, I feel it. Something, not moving but that wants to move. Wants to be free. It itches, and I don't think I want it. I don't know what to do.
>
> You can't help me. I don't think so, at least. But whatever it is that calls to me, that wants me for its own, it hates you. It hates what you are and what you do. And if it hates you, then maybe you can help me. If I wanted to be helped. I don't know if I do. You must understand, it sings so sweetly, and I need it, but I am afraid. It isn't right and I need help. I need it to be seen. To be seen in the cold light of knowledge is anathema to the things that crawl and slither and swarm in the corners and the cracks. In the pitted holes of the hive.
>
> —MAG 32: "Hive"

Like most roleplaying games, in The Magnus Archives, the GM sets the scene, the players state what their characters attempt to do, and the GM determines what happens next. One scene logically flows to the next—you might start at a coffee shop, travel to an abandoned warehouse, and eventually end up at a haunted construction site—and before you know it, you've got a story as compelling as any you've read or watched. The rules and the dice help make the game run smoothly, but it's the people, not the rules or the dice, that direct the action and determine the story—and the fun. If a rule gets in the way or detracts from the game, the players and the GM should work together to change it.

The game uses a twenty-sided die (d20) to determine the results of most actions. Whenever a roll of any kind is called for and no die is specified, roll a d20.

This is how you play:

1. The player tells the GM what they want to do. This is a *character action*. If time is a consideration, every character gets an action every five to ten seconds, a segment of time called a round. (Characters can also move across the room or a similar distance when they take their action.)
2. The GM determines if there's a chance of failure or if that action is routine (and therefore works without needing a roll).
3. If there is a chance of failure, the GM determines which stat the task uses (Might,

Speed, or Intellect) and the task's *difficulty*—how hard it will be on a scale from 1 (really easy) to 10 (basically impossible).

4. The player and the GM determine if anything about the character—such as training, equipment, special abilities, or various actions—can modify the difficulty up (hinder) or down (ease) by one or more steps. If these *modifications* reduce the difficulty to less than 1, the action is routine (and therefore works with no roll needed). A common modification comes from Effort. Using Effort is when a character spends 3 points from the appropriate stat Pool to decrease the difficulty by 1.

5. If the action still isn't routine, the GM uses its difficulty to determine the *target number*—how high the player must roll to succeed at the action. **The target number is always three times the task's difficulty**, so a difficulty 4 task has a target number of 12. To succeed at the task, you must roll the target number or higher.

6. If the character uses a special ability, there is often a prescribed cost of points from one of their stat Pools. Any time a character faces a stat Pool cost, whether from a special ability or from using Effort, they can subtract their appropriate stat Edge from the cost. Different characters have different stat Pools and Edge.

7. The player rolls a d20. If the roll is equal to or higher than the target number, the character succeeds.

That's it. That's how to do anything, whether it's identifying a strange marking, calming a frantic friend, crossing a treacherous bridge, or battling an insane cultist.

The key features here are: character actions, determining task difficulty, and determining modifications.

TAKING ACTION

On a player's turn, their character can do one thing—an action. (In addition, they can also move a bit, like across the room.) All actions fall into one of three categories: Might, Speed, or Intellect (just like the three stats). Many actions require die rolls—rolling a d20.

Every action performs a task, and every task has a difficulty that determines what number a character must reach or surpass with a die roll to succeed.

Hinder, page 119

Ease, page 118

Most tasks have a difficulty of 0, which means the character succeeds automatically. For example, walking across a room, opening a door, and throwing a stone into a nearby bucket are all actions, but none of them requires a roll. Actions that are usually difficult or that become difficult due to the situation (such as shooting at a target in a blizzard) have a higher difficulty. These actions usually require a roll.

If time is of the essence, such as in the middle of a fight, a chase, or some other action scene, the GM will measure time in rounds. Each character gets to take one turn each round. So typically everyone (including any NPCs) gets to do something before anyone gets to take their next action.

Sometimes, when time is not of the essence, the turn order becomes more fluid. If one character is trying to repair the car's engine while everyone else waits, the repairing character might take several actions while no one else does anything. If the group is searching a house for clues, one character might take a single action while the others each take several. It depends on what makes sense in the given situation.

KEY CONCEPTS

ACTION: Anything a character does that is significant—punch a foe, leap a chasm, activate a device, use a special power, and so on. Each character can take one action in a round.

CHARACTER: Any creature in the game capable of acting, whether it is a player character (PC) run by a player or a nonplayer character (NPC) run by the game master (GM). In The Magnus Archives RPG, even inhuman beasts or creatures of living darkness, for example, can be "characters."

DIFFICULTY: A measure of how easy it is to accomplish a task. Difficulty is rated on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Altering the difficulty to make a task harder is called "hindering." Altering it to make a task easier is called "easing." All changes in difficulty are measured in steps. Difficulty often equates directly with level, so opening a level 3 locked door probably has a difficulty of 3.

EASE: A decrease in a task's difficulty, usually by one step. If something doesn't say how many steps it eases a task, it reduces the difficulty by one step.

EFFORT: Spending points from a stat Pool to reduce the difficulty of a task. A PC decides whether or not to apply Effort on their turn before the roll is made. NPCs never apply Effort.

ENABLER: An ability designated an enabler does not require an action to use, but instead modifies another action the character attempts.

HINDER: An increase in a task's difficulty, usually by one step. If something doesn't say how many steps it hinders a task, it increases the difficulty by one step.

INABILITY: The opposite of trained—you're hindered whenever you attempt a task that you have an inability in. If you also become trained in the task, the training and the inability cancel each other out and you become practiced.

LEVEL: A way to measure the strength, difficulty, power, or challenge of something in the game. Everything in the game has a level. NPCs and objects have levels that determine the difficulty of any task related to them. For example, an opponent's level determines how hard they are to hit or avoid in combat. A door's level indicates how hard it is to break down. A lock's level determines how hard it is to pick. Levels are rated on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). PC tiers are a little like levels, but they go only from 1 to 6 and mechanically work very differently than levels—for example, a PC's tier does not determine a task's difficulty.

PRACTICED: The normal, unmodified ability to use a skill—not trained, specialized, or an inability. Your type determines what weapon skills you're practiced in; if you aren't practiced with a type of weapon, you have an inability in it.

ROLL: A d20 roll made by a PC to determine whether an action is successful. Although the game occasionally uses other dice, when the text simply refers to "a roll," it always means a d20 roll.

ROUND: A length of time about five to ten seconds long. There are about ten rounds in a minute. When it's really important to track precise time, use rounds. Basically, it's the length of time to take an action in the game, but since everyone more or less acts simultaneously, all characters get to take an action each round.

SPECIALIZED: Having an exceptional amount of skill in a task. Being specialized eases the task by two steps. If you are specialized in climbing, all your climbing tasks are eased by two steps.

STAT: One of the three defining characteristics for PCs: Might, Speed, or Intellect. Each stat has two values: Pool and Edge. Your Pool represents your raw, innate ability, and your Edge represents knowing how to use what you have. Points in a Pool are used to expend Effort and to utilize certain abilities. If a Pool doesn't have enough points for the character to use Effort, they can't do so until they recover some of those points. Likewise, a character without the required points to use an ability can't use that ability. Each stat Pool can increase or decrease over the course of play—for example, you can spend points from your Intellect Pool to activate a special ability, or you can rest to recover points in your Speed Pool after a long day of walking. Anything that damages a stat, restores a stat, or boosts or penalizes a stat affects the stat's Pool.

TASK: Any action that a PC attempts. The GM determines the difficulty of the task. In general, a task is something that you do and an action is you performing that task, but in most cases they mean the same thing.

TRAINED: Having a reasonable amount of skill in a task. Being trained eases the task. For example, if you are trained in climbing, all climbing tasks for you are eased. If you become very skilled at that task, you become specialized instead of trained. You do not need to be trained to attempt a task.

TURN: The part of the round when a character or creature takes its actions. For example, if a Protector and an Occultist are fighting a cultist of the Lightless Flame, each round the Protector takes an action on their turn, the Occultist takes an action on their turn, and the cultist takes an action on its turn. Some abilities or effects last only one turn, or end when the next turn is started.

DETERMINING TASK STAT

Every task relates to one of a character's three stats: Might, Speed, or Intellect. Physical activities that require strength, power, or endurance relate to Might. Physical activities that require agility, flexibility, or fast reflexes relate to Speed. Mental activities that require force of will, memory, or mental power relate to Intellect. This means you can generalize tasks into three categories: Might tasks, Speed tasks, and Intellect tasks. You can also generalize rolls into three categories: Might rolls, Speed rolls, and Intellect rolls.

The category of the task or roll determines what kind of Effort you can apply to the roll and may determine how a character's other abilities affect the roll. For example, one character may have an ability that makes them better at Intellect rolls, while another may have an ability that makes them better at Speed rolls.

If a character doesn't have enough points in the proper Pool to use Effort for the task, they cannot do so until they restore some of the points in that Pool.

DETERMINING TASK DIFFICULTY

The most frequent thing a GM does during the game—and probably the most important thing—is setting every task's difficulty. To make the job easier, use the Task Difficulty table, which associates difficulty rating with a descriptive name, a target number, and general guidance about the difficulty.

Every difficulty from 1 to 10 has a target number associated with it. The target number is easy to remember: it's always three times the difficulty. The target number is the minimum number a player needs to roll on a d20 to succeed at the task. Moving down the table means the task is more difficult, and moving up means it is less difficult.

Modifiers affect the difficulty rather than the player's roll. This has two consequences:

1. Low target numbers such as 3 or 6, which would be boring in most games that use a d20, are not boring in this game. For example, if you need to roll a 6 or higher, you still have a 25% chance to fail. If you roll a low number—like, say, a 5—don't immediately assume you fail.

TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Task Difficulty	Description	Target No.	Guidance
0	Routine	0	Anyone can do this basically every time.
1	Simple	3	Most people can do this most of the time.
2	Standard	6	Typical task requiring focus, but most people can usually do this.
3	Demanding	9	Requires full attention; most people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
4	Difficult	12	Trained people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
5	Challenging	15	Even trained people often fail.
6	Intimidating	18	Normal people almost never succeed.
7	Formidable	21	Impossible without skills or great effort.
8	Heroic	24	A task worthy of tales told for years afterward.
9	Immortal	27	A task worthy of legends that last lifetimes.
10	Impossible	30	A task that normal humans couldn't consider (but one that doesn't break the laws of physics).

2. The upper levels of difficulty (7, 8, 9, and 10) are all but impossible because the target numbers are 21 or higher, which you can't roll on a d20. However, it's common for player characters to have abilities or equipment that reduce the difficulty of a task and thus lower the target number to something they *can* roll on a d20.

When setting the difficulty of a task, the GM should rate the task on its own merits, not on the power of the characters. Difficulty is not relative. A level 4 locked door is the same no matter who tries to open it.

MODIFYING DIFFICULTY

Character skills, favorable circumstances, or excellent equipment can make a task easier. For example, if a character is trained in climbing, it turns a difficulty 6 climb into a difficulty 5 climb. This is called "*easing* the task." If the character is specialized in climbing, it turns a difficulty 6 climb into a difficulty 4 climb. This is called "easing the task by two steps."

A *skill* is a category of knowledge, ability, or activity relating to a task, such as climbing, geography, or persuasiveness. A character who has a skill is better at completing related tasks than a character who lacks the skill. A character's level of skill is either *trained* (reasonably skilled) or *specialized* (very skilled).

If you are trained in a skill relating to a task, you ease that task by one step. If you are specialized, you ease it by two steps. A skill can never ease a task by more than two steps.

Anything else that eases tasks (help from an ally, a particular piece of equipment, or some other advantage) is referred to as an *asset*. Assets can never ease a task by more than two steps.

You can also ease a given task by applying Effort. This costs 3 points from the relevant stat Pool, minus any Edge. Using Effort eases the task by one step. (At higher tiers, characters can apply additional Effort, each of which costs 2 points from the relevant stat Pool and eases the task by an additional step.)

To sum up, three things can ease a task: skills, assets, and Effort. If you can ease a task's difficulty to 0 using one or more of these, you automatically succeed and don't need to make a roll.

If something makes a task harder (like fighting on a slippery floor), it *hinders* the task by one or more steps. Hindering is the opposite of easing.

> The thunder woke me: another long, deep roar that seemed to come as much from the ground as it did the clouds. The rain still hammered down outside and I checked my watch, staring at it in confusion. It didn't make any sense. It said it was three AM, the middle of the night, but looking out through the window, the world was still light. The sky was cloudy and grey, as it had been the previous day, and the rain made it impossible to see further than the end of the street. But all the same, it definitely wasn't night. There were no streetlights turned on and, now that I looked for it, I couldn't see any windows lit in any of the other houses on the street. It seemed like it was just me. Me and the steady, driving rain.
>
> —MAG 129: "Submerged"

ROLLING THE DICE

The players always drive the action. That means they make all the die rolls. If a PC leaps out of a moving vehicle, the player rolls to see if they succeed. If a PC searches for a hidden panel, the player rolls to determine whether they find it. If a rockslide falls on a PC, the player rolls to try to get out of the way. If a PC and an NPC arm wrestle, the player rolls, and the NPC's level determines the target number. If a PC attacks a foe, the player rolls to see if they hit. If a foe attacks the PC, the player rolls to see if they dodge the blow.

As shown by the last two examples, the player rolls whether their PC is attacking or defending. Thus, something that improves defenses might ease or hinder their rolls. For example, if a PC uses a low wall to gain cover from attacks, the wall eases the player's defense rolls. If a foe uses the wall to gain cover from the PC's attacks, it hinders the player's attack rolls.

Only the player rolls dice.

SPECIAL ROLLS

When you roll a natural 19 (the d20 shows "19") and the roll is a success, you also have a minor effect. A minor effect means that in addition to success, you get an even better result determined by the character and the GM. For example, when jumping down from a ledge, you land smoothly on your feet, or when trying to persuade someone, you convince them that you're smarter than you really are. In other words, you not only succeed but also go a bit further. In a fight, when you get a minor effect, you could decide that you knock the foe back, distract them, or something similar.

When you roll a natural 20 (the d20 shows "20") and the roll is a success, you also have a major effect. This is similar to a minor effect, but the results are more remarkable. A major effect means that something beneficial happens based on the circumstance. For example, when climbing up a cliff wall, you make the ascent twice as fast. In combat, a major effect could introduce a dramatic event such as knocking down your foe, stunning them, or taking an extra action.

In combat (and only in combat), if you roll a natural 17 or 18 on your attack roll, you add 1 or 2 points of damage, respectively. Neither roll has any special effect options—just the extra damage.

Rolling a natural 1 is always bad. It means that the GM introduces a new complication into the encounter. This is called a GM intrusion.

RETRYING A TASK AFTER FAILURE

If a character fails a task (whether it's climbing a wall, picking a lock, trying to figure out a mysterious device, or something else), they can attempt it again, but they must apply at least one level of Effort when retrying that task. A retry is a new action, not part of the same action that failed, and it takes the same amount of time as the first attempt did.

Sometimes the GM might rule that retries are impossible. Perhaps a character has one chance to convince the leader of a group of thugs not to attack, and after that, no amount of talking will stop them.

This rule doesn't apply to something like attacking a foe in combat because combat is always changing and fluid. Each round's situation is new, not a repeat of a previous situation, so a missed attack can't be retried.

SPENDING XP TO REROLL

Experience points, page 141

At any time, a player can spend 1 experience point (XP) to reroll any die roll, no matter who made the initial roll. The player can take the most beneficial result. This is not an action, and the only limit for such reroll attempts is the amount of XP a player has to spend.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SITUATIONS THAT DON'T INVOLVE PCs

Ultimately, the GM is the arbiter of conflicts that do not involve the PCs. They should be adjudicated in the most interesting, logical, and story-based way possible. When in doubt, match the level of the NPCs (characters or creatures) or their respective effects to determine the results. Thus, if a level 4 NPC fights a level 3 NPC, the level 4 NPC will win, but if they face a level 7 NPC, they'll lose. Likewise, a level 4 creature resists poisons or devices of level 3 or lower but not those of level 5 and above.

The essence is this: in The Magnus Archives RPG, it doesn't matter if something is a creature, a poison, or a horrific curse. If it's a higher level, it wins; if it's a lower level, it loses. If two things of equal level oppose each other, there might be a long, drawn-out battle that could go either way.

GM INTRUSIONS

A GM intrusion reflects when something in the story occurs to complicate the character's life. The character hasn't necessarily fumbled or done anything wrong (although perhaps they did). It could just be that the task presents an unexpected difficulty or something unrelated affects the current situation.

In The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game, a GM intrusion usually heightens the tension or reveals a sudden danger. The lights go out. The characters hear something creeping up behind them. The seemingly kind old woman suddenly produces a knife, accompanied by an unnerving smile. The characters discover that their trusted friend is actually not them. GM intrusion is, in many ways, the primary tool the GM has to introduce the horror intrinsic to the game.

At any time, the GM can introduce an unexpected complication for a character or all the characters. A GM intrusion can put the spotlight on one character, and when the GM finishes explaining what the sudden, surprising turn of events is, they ask that player "Now what do you do?" The player must deal with this new complication.

When the GM intrudes in this manner, they give the affected character 2 XP. That player, in turn, must immediately give one of those XP to another player and justify the gift (perhaps their character had a good idea, told a funny joke, performed an action that saved a life, and so on).

As a general rule, the GM should intrude *at least* once each session but probably no more than once or twice each session per character.

Anytime the GM intrudes, the player can spend 1 XP to refuse the intrusion, though that also means they don't get the 2 XP. If the player has no XP to spend, they can't refuse the intrusion.

Example Intrusion: Through skill and the aid of another character, a PC eases a wall-climbing task from difficulty 2 to difficulty 0. Normally, they would succeed at the task automatically, but the GM intrudes and says, "No, a bit of the crumbling wall gives way, so you still have to make a roll." As with any difficulty 2 task, the target number is 6. The PC attempts the roll as normal, and because the GM intruded, the character gains 2 XP. The PC immediately gives one of those XP to another player.

If a character rolls a 1 on a die, the GM can intrude without giving the character any XP. This kind of intrusion can happen immediately or very soon thereafter.

PLAYER INTRUSION

A player intrusion is the player choosing to alter something in the campaign, making things easier for a player character. Conceptually, it is the reverse of a GM intrusion: instead of the GM giving the player XP and introducing an unexpected complication for a character, the player spends 1 XP and presents a solution to a problem or complication. What a player intrusion can do usually introduces a change to the world or current circumstances rather than directly changing the character. For instance, an intrusion indicating that the cypher just used still has an additional use would be appropriate, but an intrusion that heals the character would not. If a player has no XP to spend, they can't use a player intrusion.

A few player intrusion examples are provided below. That said, not every player intrusion listed here is appropriate for all situations. The GM may allow players to come up with other player intrusion suggestions, but the GM is the final arbiter of whether the suggested intrusion is appropriate and suitable for the situation. If the GM refuses the intrusion, the player doesn't spend the 1 XP, and the intrusion doesn't occur.

Using an intrusion does not require a character to use an action to trigger it. A player intrusion just happens.

Old Friend: A friend from your past shows up unexpectedly and provides aid in whatever you're doing. They've got business of their own and can't stay much longer than it takes to help out, chat for a while after, and perhaps share a quick meal.

Advantageous Malfunction: A device being used by an NPC malfunctions, to your benefit. The cell phone someone tries to use to call for help is out of battery, an assailant's gun jams, the computer monitor flashes brightly for a few rounds and distracts the user, the handcuffs you're in didn't quite latch, or the metal detector doesn't pick up the mystical amulet you have in your pocket.

Inexplicably Unbroken: An inactive, ruined, or presumed-destroyed device temporarily activates and performs a useful function relevant to the situation. Your out-of-gas car gets you a few more miles into town. The smashed radio sputters with life for one more use. The seemingly empty lighter contains just enough to start one last fire.

Weak Strain: The poison or disease turns out not to be as debilitating or deadly as it first seemed and inflicts only half the damage that it would have otherwise.

Friendly NPC: An NPC you don't know, someone you don't know that well, or someone you know but who hasn't been particularly friendly in the past chooses to help you, though they don't necessarily explain why. Maybe they'll ask you for a favor in return afterward, depending on how much trouble they go to.

Using GM Intrusions in Horror Mode, page 297

Perfect Suggestion: An already-friendly NPC suggests a course of action with regard to an urgent question, problem, or obstacle you're facing.

Unexpected Gift: An NPC hands you a physical gift you were not expecting, one that helps put the situation at ease if things seem strained, or provides you with a new insight for understanding the context of the situation if there's something you're failing to understand or grasp.

HORROR MODE

In times of escalating tension, the GM can activate Horror Mode. In an investigation, Horror Mode can be activated when the PCs encounter a specific creature or person, but it is usually activated when they enter a particular location.

During normal play, PCs interact with each other and the NPCs, investigate, research, travel, and so on. But when they enter a house affected by The Spiral, the Avatar of The Hunt gets close, the minions of The Buried beneath the earth awaken, or whatever horrific situation planned by the GM begins, things change. This is when the GM should announce that the game has gone into Horror Mode.

This is a cue for the players (not the characters) to recognize that things are getting bad. It's the RPG equivalent of spooky music beginning to play in a horror film or a change in Jonny's voice when reading a statement.

The idea is to create a feeling of escalating dread and menace by changing one die roll mechanic. When Horror Mode is first activated, GM intrusions occur on a natural roll of 1 or 2, instead of just a 1.

Horror Mode heightens every time a player's roll indicates an intrusion, and whenever the GM feels that the danger in the story escalates. A good rule of thumb is for the GM to heighten Horror Mode anytime something would normally activate Horror Mode while it is already in effect.

Each time Horror Mode heightens, the GM intrusion die roll range increases by 1 so GM intrusions might happen on a roll of 1–3, 1–4, and so on. A die roll in Horror Mode can potentially both indicate success in a task and still trigger a GM intrusion. As the intrusion range changes with each escalation, the GM should announce this to the players. The feeling of rising tension should be dramatic and overt.

When Horror Mode ends (usually meaning that the characters are no longer in a dangerous situation), the GM intrusion result returns to only a natural 1.

INTERACTION

Obviously, players can talk to each other all they want, and at least some of that conversation represents what the characters are saying to each other. Often, a PC will want to talk to an NPC. It might be to convince someone to answer a few questions, get a librarian to let you see a book from the restricted collection, or get a peek at a police report from an officer at the station. This conversation is normally handled by the GM taking on the NPC role and talking things through. When a PC tries to convince an NPC of something, or when they try to deceive or intimidate the NPC, a roll is involved. This is handled just like anything else—use the level of the NPC as the difficulty, modified by the circumstances.

Trying to convince a loyal believer to disobey orders is harder than their level might indicate, but convincing them that new orders have come in might be normal. Skills like persuasion or deception might help, and of course, Effort can be used (always Intellect).

You can always attempt any action—you do not need to be trained or specialized in a related skill. In other words, being trained in driving doesn't let you drive a car, it just makes you good at it. Anyone can still try to drive. It's just a bit harder.

COMBAT

> They tried to run, but we were everywhere, and they couldn't stop us undoing them for parts. You weren't there, which was sad, but it made it easier.
>
> At least until the knife. I don't know what the skinny one did, what she was, but that knife hurt.
>
> She screamed, and stabbed, and cut through all the others, ruining their perfect bodies. Then, she turned on me. Reached out with some of my hands, to get inside her, and pull her apart, and she cut them off.
>
> —MAG 131: "Flesh"

An attack is anything you do to someone that they don't want you to do. Slashing a foe with a curved dagger is an attack, blasting a foe with a lightning artefact is an attack, wrapping a foe in magnetically controlled metal cables is an attack, and controlling someone's mind is an attack. An attack almost always requires a roll to see if you hit or otherwise affect your target.

Stress and Injury, page 128

Making an attack in combat works the same way as any other roll: the GM assigns a difficulty to the task, and you roll a d20 against the associated target number.

The difficulty of your attack roll depends on how powerful your opponent is. Just as tasks have a difficulty from 1 to 10, creatures have a level from 1 to 10. Most of the time, the difficulty of your attack or your defense roll is the same as the creature's level. For example, if you attack a level 3 black bear, it's a level 3 task, so your target number is 9. Likewise, it's a level 3 task to defend against its attack.

Remember: players make all die rolls. If a character attacks a creature, the player makes an attack roll. If a creature attacks a character, the player makes a defense roll.

CHARACTERS INFLICTING DAMAGE

NPCs don't have a damage track, nor do they suffer Stress. Instead, they have a characteristic called health. When an NPC takes damage of any kind, the amount is subtracted from its health. Unless described otherwise, an NPC's health is always equal to its target number. Some NPCs might have special reactions to or defenses against attacks that are unique to them.

Damage is always a specific amount determined by the attack. For example, a slash with a machete or a shot from a pistol deals 4 points of damage. Often, there are ways for the attacker to increase the damage. For example, a PC can apply Effort to deal 3 additional points of damage, and rolling a natural 17 on the attack roll deals 1 additional point of damage.

For damage inflicted *upon* characters, see Stress and Injury.

ENCOUNTERS, ROUNDS, AND INITIATIVE

Sometimes in the course of the game, the GM or players will refer to an "encounter." Encounters are not so much measurements of time as they are events or instances in which something happens, like a scene of a movie or a chapter in a book. An encounter might

HINDER AND EASE

Rather than worrying about a long list of special situations that modify different actions in different ways, hinder and ease are the only modifiers you'll ever need. If something makes a task easier, the task is eased, lowering the difficulty by one step. If something makes it harder, the task is hindered, raising the difficulty by one step.

If a character takes cover, their Speed defense tasks are eased. If they're underwater, their physical actions are hindered. If it's dark, any task related to vision is hindered. If they're attacking with surprise, their attacks are eased. And so on.

It's possible for a single situation to ease or hinder an action by more than one step, but these are very rare and should be kept to a minimum. Multiple factors in effect at once might do this fairly often, however—someone who's skilled at climbing, using good climbing gear, and getting advice and help from a climbing expert might have their climbing tasks eased by three steps, for example.

If a task is both eased and hindered by different things, these modifications cancel each other out.

be a fight with a foe, a dramatic crossing of a raging river, or a stressful negotiation with an important official. It's useful to use the word when referring to a specific scene, as in "My Might Pool is low after that encounter with the sorcerer yesterday."

As noted under Key Concepts, a round is about five to ten seconds. The length of time is variable because sometimes one round might be a bit longer than another. You don't need to measure time more precisely than that. You can estimate that on average there are about ten rounds in a minute. In a round, everyone—each character and NPC—gets to take one action.

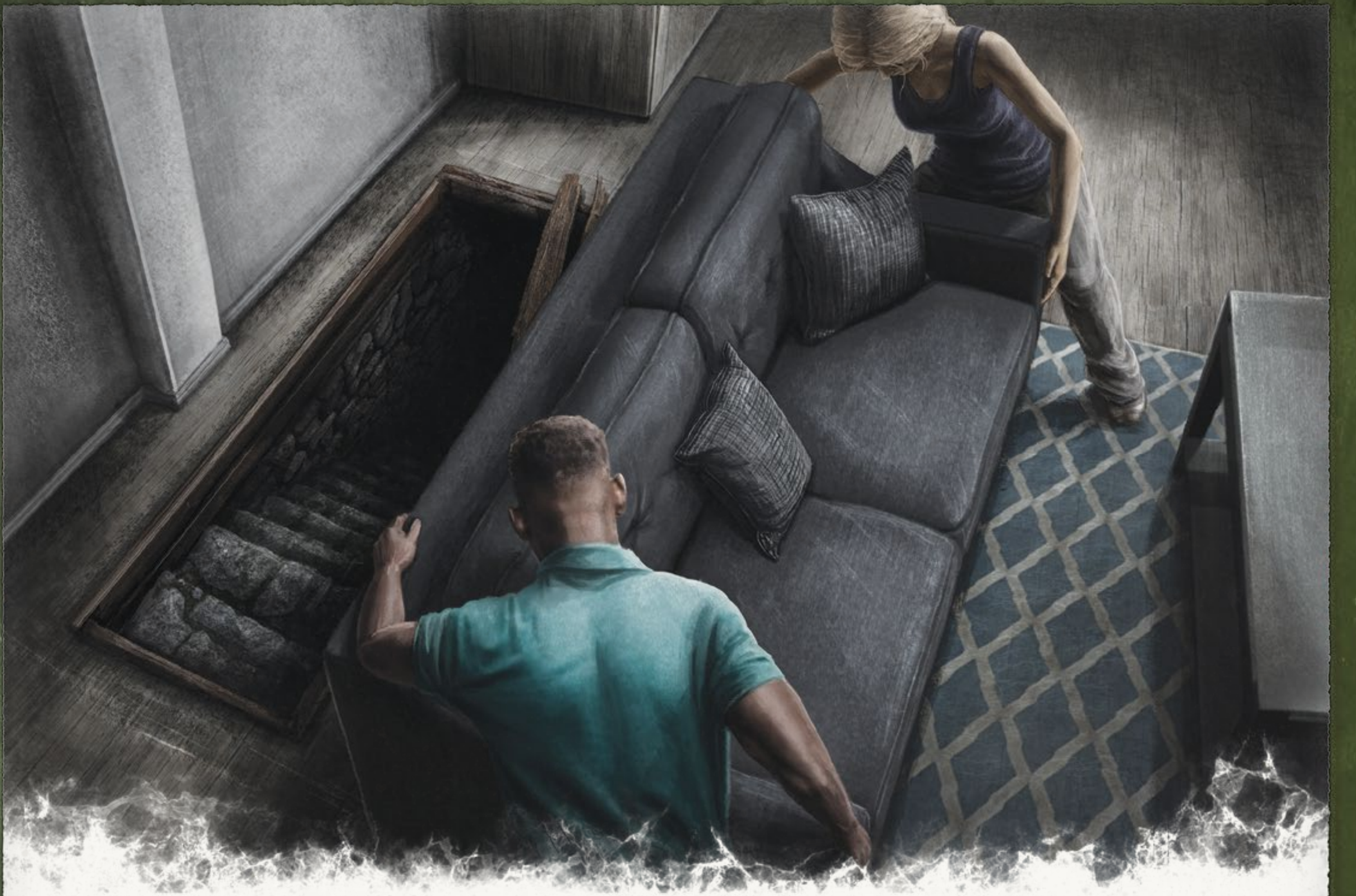
To determine who goes first, second, and so on in a round, each player makes a Speed roll called an initiative roll. Most of the time, it's only important to know which characters act before the NPCs and which act after the NPCs. On an initiative roll, a character who rolls higher than an NPC's target number takes their action before the NPC does. As with all target numbers, an NPC's target number for an initiative roll is three times the NPC's level. Many times, the GM will have all NPCs take their actions at the same time, using the highest target number from among all the NPCs. Using this method, any characters who rolled higher than the target number act first, then all the NPCs act, and finally any characters who rolled lower than the target number act.

The order in which the characters act usually isn't important. If the players want to go in a precise order, they can act in initiative order (highest to lowest), or by going around the table.

For example, Charles, Tammie, and Shanna's characters are in combat with two level 2 security guards. The GM has the players make Speed rolls to determine initiative. Charles rolls an 8, Shanna rolls a 15, and Tammie rolls a 4. The target number for a level 2 creature is 6, so each round Charles and Shanna act before the guards, then the guards act, and finally Tammie acts. It doesn't matter whether Charles acts before or after Shanna, as long as they think it's fair.

After everyone—all PCs and NPCs—in the combat has had a turn, the round ends and a new round begins. In all rounds after the first, everyone acts in the same order as they did in the first round. The characters cycle through this order until the logical end of the encounter (the end of the fight or the completion of the event) or until the GM asks them to make new initiative rolls. The GM can call for new initiative rolls at the beginning of any new round when conditions drastically change. For example, if the NPCs gain reinforcements, the environment changes

Key Concepts, page 116



Sometimes, the GM will call for an initiative roll from the players and track things round by round even though there's no combat going on. This is useful when a bit more precision is needed to know who does what, when. If the PCs are sneaking into a house, and some are slipping under a closing garage door while one is going through the kitchen window, it's useful to know who gets under the garage door in time and who doesn't, and if the character going through the window does so before the watchdog comes into the kitchen.

(perhaps the lights go out), the terrain changes (maybe part of the balcony collapses under the PCs), or something similar occurs, the GM can call for new initiative rolls.

Since the action moves as a cycle, anything that lasts for a round ends where it started in the cycle. If Javier uses an ability on an opponent that hinders its defenses for one round, the effect lasts until Javier acts on his next turn.

COOPERATIVE ACTIONS

There are many ways multiple characters can work together. None of these options, however, can be used at the same time by the same characters.

Helping: If you use your action to help someone with a task, you ease the task. If you have an inability in a task, your help has no effect. If you use your action to help someone with a task that you are trained or specialized in, the task is eased by two steps. Help is considered an asset, and someone receiving help usually can't gain more than two assets on a single task if that help is provided by another character.

For example, if Scott is trying to drive a large bus and Sarah (who is trained in driving) spends her turn helping him, Scott's task is eased by two steps.

Sometimes you can help by performing a task that complements what another person is attempting. If your complementary action succeeds, you ease the other person's task. For example, if Scott tries to persuade a ship captain to let him on board, Sarah could try to supplement Scott's words with a flattering lie about the captain (a deception action), a display of knowledge about the region where the ship is headed (a geography action), or a direct threat to the captain (an intimidation action). If Sarah's roll is a success, Scott's persuasion task is eased.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Most of the time, the rules are simple and straightforward, getting out of the way of the narrative. Sometimes, however, a few special situations can crop up that require a little extra explanation.

COMBAT BETWEEN NPCs

When an NPC ally of the PCs attacks another NPC, the GM can designate a player to roll and handle it like a PC attacking, with the NPC inflicting damage equal to their level. Often, the choice is obvious. For example, a character who has a trained attack dog should roll when their pet attacks enemies. If an NPC ally accompanying the party leaps into the fray, that ally's favorite PC rolls for them. NPCs cannot apply Effort. Of course, it's perfectly fitting (and easier) to have the NPC ally use the cooperative action rules to aid a PC instead of making direct attacks, or to compare the levels of the two NPCs (higher wins).

COMBAT BETWEEN PCs

When one PC attacks another PC, the attacking character makes an attack roll, and the other character makes a defense roll, adding any appropriate modifiers. If the attacking PC has a skill, ability, asset, or other effect that would ease the attack if it were made against an NPC, the character adds 3 to the roll for each step reduction (+3 for one step, +6 for two steps, and so on). If the attacker's final result is higher, the attack hits. If the defender's result is higher, the attack misses. Damage is resolved so that 1 to 3 points of damage become 1 to 3 points of Stress, and 4+ points of damage become a serious injury. The GM mediates all special effects.

AREA ATTACKS

Sometimes, an attack or effect affects an area rather than a single target. For example, a grenade or a landslide can potentially harm or affect everyone in the area.

In an area attack, all PCs in the area make appropriate defense rolls against the attack to determine its effect on them. If the attack is launched by a PC against some NPCs in the area, the attacker makes a single attack roll against all of them (one roll, not one roll per NPC) and compares it to the target number of each NPC. If the roll is equal to or greater than the target number of a particular NPC, the attack hits that NPC.

Some area attacks always deal at least a minimum amount of damage, even if the attacks miss or if a PC makes a successful defense roll.

For example, consider a character who uses a bundle of dynamite to attack six cultists (level 2; target number 6) and their leader (level 4; target number 12). The PC rolls an 11 for the attack roll. This hits the six cultists, but not the leader, so the explosion deals 3 points of damage to each of the cultists. The GM figures, however, that with such an explosion, targets take 1 point of damage if the PC fails the attack roll, so the leader takes 1 point of damage. In terms of what happens in the story, the cultists are caught flat-footed by the sudden detonation, but the leader ducks and is shielded from most of the blast.

ATTACKING OBJECTS

Attacking an object is rarely a matter of hitting it. Sure, you can hit the broad side of a barn, but can you damage it? Attacking inanimate objects with a melee weapon is a Might action. Objects have levels and thus target numbers. Objects have a damage track that works like the damage track for PCs.

Intact is the default state for an object.

Minor damage is a slightly damaged state. An object with minor damage reduces its level by 1.

Major damage is a critically damaged state. An object with major damage is broken and no longer functions.

Destroyed is destroyed. The object is ruined, no longer functions, and cannot be repaired.

If the Might action to damage an object is a success, the object moves one step down the object damage track. If the Might roll exceeded the difficulty by 2 levels, the object instead moves two steps down the object damage track. If the Might roll exceeded the difficulty by 4 levels, the object instead moves three steps down the object damage track. Objects with minor or major damage can be repaired, moving them one or more steps up the object damage track.

Brittle or fragile objects, like those made of paper or glass, decrease the effective level of the object for the purposes of determining if it is damaged. Hard objects, like those made of wood or stone, add 1 to the effective level. Very hard objects, like those made of metal, add 2. Some objects, like artefacts, can't be damaged, at least by normal means.

The tool or weapon used to attack the object must be at least as hard as the object itself. Further, if the amount of damage the attack could inflict—not modified by a special die roll—does not equal or exceed the effective level of the object, the attack cannot damage the object no matter what the roll.

Distraction: When a character uses their turn to distract a foe, that foe's attacks are hindered for one round. Multiple characters distracting a foe have no greater effect than a single character doing so—a foe is either distracted or not. A distraction might be yelling a challenge, firing a warning shot, or a similar activity that doesn't harm the foe.

Draw the Attack: When an NPC attacks a character, another PC can prominently present themselves, shout taunts, and move to try to get the foe to attack them instead. In most cases, this action succeeds without a roll—the opponent attacks the prominent PC instead of their companions. In other cases, such as with intelligent or determined foes, the prominent character must succeed at an Intellect action to draw the attack. If that Intellect action is successful, the foe attacks the prominent character, whose defenses are hindered by two steps. Two characters attempting to draw an attack at the same time cancel each other out.

Take the Attack: A character can use their action to throw themselves in front of a foe's successful attack to save a nearby comrade. The attack automatically succeeds against the sacrificial character, and it deals 1 additional point of Stress, in addition to whatever Stress or injury it would have caused. A character cannot willingly take more than one attack each round in this way.

STRESS AND INJURY

There are two ways that characters can suffer damage. One is Stress, and the other is injury. Stress reflects things that affect a character briefly, such as a shock, a bad experience, or a minor wound (the kind that causes a bit of distress, but is usually better with a breather or a small bandage). Injury is actual, serious physical wounds that might send you to the hospital. Or the morgue.

STRESS

When player characters experience a terrifying event, they may suffer Stress. This might be facing an actual ghost, finding a sack of hundreds of human teeth, or seeing your friend engulfed in a swarm of worms. A character begins with 0 Stress, but a terrible shock, a ghastly experience, or a gruesome encounter may inflict 1, 2, or even 3 points of Stress on them. Players track their character's ongoing Stress total. Every 3 points of accumulated Stress constitutes a *Stress level*. Players should keep track of their ongoing Stress points total, but also their current Stress level count.

Characters can also get Stress from minor wounds and physical damage. Knocking your head on the door, slicing your hand with a knife, or burning your arm by grabbing something out of a fire before it is consumed causes Stress. Essentially, any time a character takes an injury that might affect them temporarily but is never life-threatening, the character gains 1, 2, or 3 points of Stress. We'll get to more serious injuries shortly.

Utilizing any supernatural artefact, power, ritual, or the like also inflicts Stress on the character.

Some characters have (or gain) the ability to withstand more Stress before it accumulates into a Stress level.

Accumulated Stress adversely affects a character by imposing a penalty on all actions, hindering them. The more Stress a character has, the greater this penalty. Each Stress level hinders all actions by one step until the Stress is reduced.

If a character has 4 levels of Stress, each full level of Stress thereafter is also a serious injury. Eventually, Stress can kill.

NPCs AND STRESS

Most often, if something gives Stress to an NPC, including an inhuman creature, that Stress is subtracted from their health score. This depends on the circumstance, of course. Nonhuman creatures (or humans completely twisted by the Entities) very likely do not suffer Stress from shock or dismay.

Many NPCs that have a strong connection to the supernatural also are immune to gaining Stress by experiencing something supernatural. So The Anglerfish doesn't gain Stress by seeing a lightless beast, and a dabbler doesn't gain Stress from witnessing the result of a horrific spell.

> He split open like a flower bud blooming, and inside there was only the most terrifying heat. She had no time to run, and by the time she thought to scream it was too late as the thing enveloped her, closing tight, until she was simply more ash, trapped forever inside that charred and hollow shell.
>
> —MAG 167: "Curiosity"

USING STRESS

If someone says that they perform better under stress, they're talking about eustress. Distress is stress that is bad, but eustress is stress that is good. It energizes us and improves our outlook. For the most part, The Magnus Archives RPG only deals in distress when it talks about Stress. However, sometimes a character can draw upon their accumulated Stress as eustress.

NPC health, page 124

The Anglerfish, page 197

Lightless beast, page 224

Dabbler, page 209

You are unlikely to see the distinction between distress and eustress again in these rules. Eustress is an interesting real-world term that doesn't see a lot of use. Except for the brief exception of using Stress, all Stress in the game is distress—the bad kind. Most of the time, the concept of eustress can be a narrative explanation for using Effort or making a good die roll.

A desperate character in a tense situation can use their Stress as a temporary advantage. If they have at least 1 Stress level, they can turn that into a one-time bonus on a single action, "burning" the Stress and easing the task by one step rather than letting it hinder them as normal. Doing so represents a sort of manic energy. While this means a reduction in the character's Stress level, the GM immediately uses an intrusion that increases the overall tension and danger of the situation. Stress cannot be used in this way by a character who is not already in a tense situation, and it can never be used on a defensive action.

Lastly, in certain situations, characters can use Stress to gain supernatural powers. Characters in a long-term campaign should keep track of full Stress levels that are gained through supernatural means. This means shock from experiencing something supernatural, but also damage from supernatural sources. Even after this Stress is removed through rest or other means, this total should remain recorded. If a character reaches a total of 10 such levels, they have been "touched" by the Entities enough that they can take on a supernatural aspect to themselves. Seeing your friend struck by a car causes Stress, but it's not from a supernatural source. Witnessing the sudden appearance of the minions of The Buried rise up from beneath the ground is Stress from a supernatural source.

Supernatural type abilities, page 27

Avatar foci, page 89

Characters who gain a supernatural aspect can take type abilities marked as supernatural as they advance. Further, they can also choose to become an Avatar and gain access to special focus abilities as well.

Good GMs will be very fair about giving characters Stress when there is no roll to resist it, or when a character succeeds on a roll but still gets 1 point of Stress, doing so very sparingly and always with a good explanation.

These powers represent how a character is changed by their experiences. Depending on the power, the PC might not have complete control over their new ability, at least at first. In what can only be described as horrific irony, using such powers almost always inflicts additional Stress on the character.

AVOIDING OR RESISTING STRESS

Sometimes, players can make a roll to avoid gaining Stress. This is an Intellect defense roll. If the source of the Stress is a creature or an effect with a level, that level is the difficulty of the roll to avoid it. Otherwise, the GM assigns an appropriate difficulty. **When in doubt, the difficulty is 5.**

A roll is involved when:

- The Stress comes from a minor injury that can be avoided. The GM might call for Speed-based rolls as everyone walks along a path slick with mud. Those who fail slip and fall and take 1 point of Stress. Those who succeed take none. Likewise, if an assailant slashes at a character with a knife, they likely suffer Stress from the laceration if they fail at their Speed defense roll, and none if they succeed.
- The Stress comes from an experience, such as seeing a ghost or watching your best friend fall out of a window. These experiences require an Intellect defense roll to resist the resulting Stress. Success usually means no Stress, but the GM can rule otherwise.

Other times, a player doesn't roll to avoid Stress. The GM just states that a character has gained Stress and how much. There is no roll involved when:

- The Stress comes from something that a character did intentionally, like activating an artefact or calling upon a supernatural ability.
- The GM determines that the severity of the Stress is so great that no roll is possible or that even a successful roll results in 1 point of Stress. For example, if a PC's one true love who died years before suddenly appears and attacks them, that's probably unavoidable Stress. Or, even if you duck behind cover successfully as someone unloads a shotgun at you, the GM might determine that you still suffer 1 point of Stress (particularly if you've never been shot at before).

So that players don't have to make lots and lots of rolls to avoid Stress when there are multiple things potentially inflicting it, the GM might combine all the sources of Stress into a single roll. In such a case, the Stress inflicted should be 3 points, and the roll to resist it should be equal to the level of the highest source. A character should never gain more than 3 points of Stress in a single round.

DETERMINING STRESS GAINED

Not all events and experiences that incur Stress do so with the same intensity.

Creature attacks or supernatural actions that give Stress usually specify the amount. For example, if you encounter the creature called The Anglerfish, you gain 3 points of Stress just from the realization of what it is. Likewise, if a character uses the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*, they gain 3 points of Stress.

To determine how much Stress you might suffer from a given experience, use the following examples as guidelines.

1 point of Stress

- Watching someone you care about in real danger
- Encountering a sudden, surprising threat (like a falling rock or an attacker leaping from the darkness)
- Experiencing a very serious threat (someone is pointing a gun at your head, or you're hanging from the roof of a tall building)
- Witnessing a supernatural event or creature from a distance
- Coming upon a human corpse
- Killing a person in self-defense
- Bumping your head on a doorway
- Getting a small cut on your hand
- Getting a hard punch in your arm

2 points of Stress

- Experiencing something that you would have believed impossible (seeing a reflection in a mirror of something not in the room, or hearing your name whispered in the darkness)
- Seeing a supernatural event or creature up close
- Coming upon a gruesomely mutilated corpse
- Watching someone you care about get seriously injured
- Falling down the stairs
- Getting a cut along your cheek
- Getting a hard punch in your stomach or face

3 points of Stress

- Experiencing something that challenges your entire outlook on reality (a portal opens to another universe, an entire house disappears before your eyes, or a corpse gets up and walks)
- Having something supernatural and terrifying trying to directly harm you
- Experiencing something too alien to comprehend
- Watching someone you care about die
- Getting sliced by a knife across your leg
- Being grazed by a bullet

As you can see, something bad doesn't have to befall a character for them to gain Stress. Dodging out of the way of a speeding car still inflicts 1 point of Stress (if you don't dodge, you'll probably be seriously injured). Even just seeing a friend in danger or facing a serious threat yourself—like a mugger pulling a knife on you—gives you 1 point of Stress.

This means that in a fight or an action sequence, the GM should pay attention not only to the character being attacked or affected, but also to their nearby friends. If even one ally is in danger, it may cause Stress for everyone.

This kind of "bystander" Stress happens only once in a given encounter. If you see your friend getting shot at, you might gain 1 point of Stress. If, on the next round, they're still getting shot at, you don't gain additional Stress.

The Anglerfish, page 197

Catalogue of the Trapped Dead, *page 270*

In an action- or horror-filled encounter, PCs likely gain a lot of Stress as they suffer damage but also as they see their friends suffer damage, barely escape harrowing fates, or just experience something supernatural.

Characters who suffer a lot of Stress may find all their tasks hindered by three, four, or more steps. At that point, they should really just flee.

When a character who is impaired moves up the damage track, they always go to hale (not hurt, even if they have that special step).

STRESS OVER TIME

Occasionally, an effect (such as a curse or a disease) or some other circumstance (such as possession of a dangerous artefact) gives a character Stress over time. For example, a character might be cursed to form painful boils on their flesh that worsen every day, and this might be represented by them gaining 3 points of Stress each day. The GM can assign this Stress to the character 1 point at a time throughout the day, usually at inopportune times, or it can accumulate all at once, usually about halfway through the character's day.

A GM intrusion for a character suffering a serious injury could be a broken bone, a twisted ankle, a dislocated arm, and so forth. In such a case, the character might suffer a penalty to certain actions even after the damage is treated, because now their arm is in a sling or cast, they're walking with a crutch or cane, or the like.

SERIOUS INJURY

When a physical wound or injury is greater than those that inflict 3 points of Stress, it is referred to as a serious injury. To reflect a serious injury, PCs have a *damage track*. The typical character's damage track has four states (from best to worst): hale, impaired, debilitated, and dead. When a character suffers a serious injury, like a stab wound, a gunshot wound, a fall from a rooftop, or the body-morphing touch of The Boneturner, the character moves one step down the damage track. Thus, if they are hale, they become impaired. If they are already impaired, they become debilitated. If they are already debilitated, they are dead.

The Boneturner, page 201

Very tough or hardy characters have an additional step on their damage track called "hurt." Hurt is inserted into the track between hale and impaired.

A serious injury probably requires a character to get medical help as soon as possible to deal with it. See Recovery and Healing.

Recovery and Healing, page 135

THE DAMAGE TRACK

Hale is the normal state for a character: the PC has no penalties from harmful conditions.

Hurt is a special step available that particularly tough characters reach before they are impaired. It imposes no penalties. Most characters skip this step and go right to impaired.

Impaired is a wounded or injured state. When an impaired character applies Effort, it costs 1 extra point per level applied. For example, applying one level of Effort costs 4 points instead of 3, and applying two levels of Effort costs 7 points instead of 5.

An impaired character ignores minor and major effect results on their rolls and doesn't deal extra damage in combat with a special roll.

Debilitated is a critically injured state. A debilitated character may not take any actions other than to move (probably crawl).

Dead is dead.

DAMAGE FROM HAZARDS

Attacks aren't the only way to inflict damage on a character. Experiences such as falling from a great height, being burned in a fire, and spending time in severe weather also deal damage. Although no list of potential hazards could be comprehensive, the Damage From Hazards table includes common examples.

DAMAGE FROM HAZARDS

Source	Damage	Notes
Falling	2 Stress for falling up to 10 feet (3 m), fallen, serious injury otherwise	—
Minor fire	3 Stress per round	Torch
Major fire	Serious injury each round	Engulfed in flames; lava
Acid splash	2 Stress per round	—
Acid bath	Serious injury each round	Immersed in acid
Cold	1 Stress per minute	Below freezing temperatures
Severe cold	Serious injury each round	Liquid nitrogen
Shock	1 Stress per round	Often involves losing next action
Electrocution	Serious injury each round	Often involves losing next action
Crush	3 Stress	Heavy object or creature falls on character
Huge crush	Serious injury	Roof collapse; cave-in
Collision	Serious injury	Large, fast object strikes character

OTHER TYPES OF DAMAGE

The Distortion, page 216

The Fears, page 166

Some attacks, like venom from a serpent's bite, a horrific curse, or the presence of The Distortion, have effects other than Stress or shifting the PC on the damage track. These attacks can cause unconsciousness, paralysis, and so on.

There are three kinds of defense rolls:

Speed defense: Used to dodge attacks or things coming at you.

Might defense: Used to resist poison, disease, or effects that directly affect your body or health.

Intellect defense: Used to resist Stress and most supernatural or mental attacks.

Most of the time, these are conditions that exist outside of Stress or the damage track. You're either unconscious or not. If you're unconscious, you can't act—that's just logic. Resisting such an attack probably involves a Might defense roll, and if you fail, there's probably a set duration for which you will be afflicted.

Other times, a psychic attack might cause you to seize up, sap your will to act, make you forget things, or even control your actions. Resisting such an attack probably involves an Intellect defense roll, and if you fail, there's probably a set duration for which you will be affected.

There are so many terrible fates that can befall a character going up against the forces of the Fears that we can't enumerate them all here, but for the most part, they're all handled in the same way—you make a defense roll and hope for the best (and use Effort!).

Rarely, an effect might damage a character's stat Pool, directly reducing the points in the Pool. For example, a snake's venom that harms a character's reflexes might inflict 3 points of damage to their Speed Pool. As another example, a mentally draining song playing over a supernatural loudspeaker might inflict 2 points of damage to someone's Intellect Pool each round. These reductions from stat Pools can be recovered as normal.

RECOVERY AND HEALING

Characters have three aspects of their stats they will want to restore. They're going to want to reduce their Stress, recover points used from their Pools, and—if they've been seriously injured—move back up the damage track. For all three, almost always, this takes time.

During an investigation, characters will likely have opportunities to rest to regain points in their Pools and reduce their Stress. But a character who's been seriously injured probably won't be able to recover from that until the investigation is over. However, other factors can play into this as well.

HEALING ACTIONS

Any character can attempt to help another using first aid techniques, soothing words, or other methods to reduce Stress and tend to injury.

Stress: A character that wishes to reduce the Stress of another (or themselves) can attempt a healing task with a difficulty equal to the amount of Stress they want to reduce. So reducing someone's Stress by 3 points has a difficulty of 3.

Subsequent healing tasks to deal with more Stress may only be attempted after the stressed character rests for at least an hour for every healing task attempted.

Serious Injury: To move a seriously injured character up the damage track from impaired (or hurt) to hale is a task that requires an hour and has a difficulty of 6. A character more injured than that probably requires a hospital setting and lots of rest. Attempts to heal oneself in this fashion are hindered.

ALLEVIATING STRESS

Time in a relatively safe, relaxing space reduces Stress by 3 points per hour. Other factors, like food and drink, nearby friends, or even a nice dog to pet can help further.

Characters may get cyphers that allow them to alleviate Stress or recover points in a Pool immediately, on a one-time basis. See chapter 6.

Activity	Additional Stress Reduction
Eating or drinking	3 points immediately (requires at least one action; can only be used once a day)
Interacting with a pet	+1 point each hour resting
Meditation	+1 point each hour resting
Interacting with trusted friends	+1 point each hour resting

RECOVERING POINTS IN A POOL

After losing or spending points in a Pool, you recover those points by resting. You can't increase a Pool past its maximum by resting—just back to its normal level. Any extra points gained go away with no effect. The amount of points you recover from a rest, and how long each rest takes, depends on how many times you have rested so far that day.

When you rest, make a recovery roll. To do this, roll a d6 and add your tier. You recover that many points, and you can divide them among your stat Pools however you wish. For example, if your recovery roll is 4 and you've lost 4 points of Might and 2 points of Speed, you can recover 4 points of Might, or 2 points of Might and 2 points of Speed, or any other combination adding up to 4 points.

The first time you rest each day, it takes only a few seconds to catch your breath. If you rest this way in the middle of an encounter, it takes one action on your turn.

Restoring the Damage Track, page 136

The second time you rest each day, you must rest for ten minutes to make a recovery roll. The third time you rest each day, you must rest for one hour to make a recovery roll. The fourth time you rest each day, you must rest for ten hours to make a recovery roll (usually, this occurs when you stop for the day to eat and sleep).

After that much rest, it's assumed to be a new day, so the next time you rest, it takes only a few seconds. The next rest takes ten minutes, then one hour, and so on, in a cycle.

If you haven't rested yet that day and you take a lot of damage in a fight, you could rest a few seconds (regaining 1d6 points + 1 point per tier) and then immediately rest for ten minutes (regaining another 1d6 points + 1 point per tier). Thus, in one full day of doing nothing but resting, you could recover 4d6 points + 4 points per tier.

Each character chooses when to make recovery rolls. If a party of five PCs rests for ten minutes because two of them want to make recovery rolls, the others don't have to make rolls at that time. Later in the day, those three can decide to rest for ten minutes and make recovery rolls.

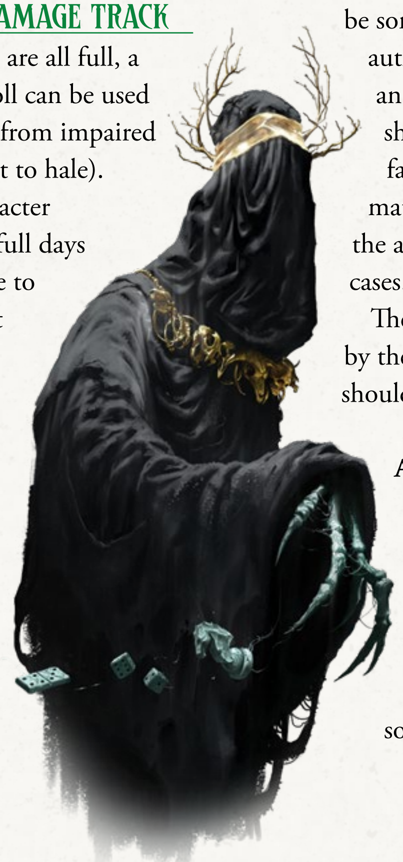
Recovery Roll	Rest Time Needed
First recovery roll	One action
Second recovery roll	Ten minutes
Third recovery roll	One hour
Fourth recovery roll	Ten hours

RESTORING THE DAMAGE TRACK

If a character's Pools are all full, a ten-hour recovery roll can be used to move a character from impaired to hale (or from hurt to hale).

A debilitated character typically needs two full days of inactivity to move to impaired. Treatment by someone skilled in medicine (like a doctor) can reduce this to just one day. Then at least one more full night's rest is required to get to hale.

A GM intrusion, when it seems appropriate (and doesn't ruin the ongoing story), could require a longer convalescent period (and perhaps a hospital stay) of, say, a week or more. This isn't just a nod toward realism—it's a way to narratively underscore the severity of an injury. Because the character gains an XP from the intrusion, it's not a punishment, but rather a reward.



THE RAMIFICATIONS OF DEATH

This is a deadly game about deadly threats. But what happens when a character dies? There are a few possibilities.

Replacement: The most obvious turn of events when a character dies is that the player creates a new character to replace the one they lost. They use the same character creation rules as they did before, creating a new person who joins the investigation. If the PCs work for the Magnus Institute (or something similar), the new character is most likely a new hire who can (and probably should) be brought up to speed quickly on what the PCs are doing.

Alternatively, the replacement character could be a side NPC who's already been involved in the story at least a little bit. This has the advantage of incorporating a character who's already established as a part of things.

It would be entirely fitting to pause the ongoing story so the deceased character's friends (presumably, the other PCs) can mourn. It's also worth mentioning that unless the death is somehow covered up, there will be some kind of investigation by the local authorities. Unless this investigation is an important part of the larger story, it should be resolved one way or another fairly quickly. One imagines that in matters the PCs are likely involved in, the authorities are accustomed to unsolved cases.

The time of mourning and investigation by the authorities are points to remember should NPC allies or others be killed.

Avatar Transformation: Death can be an illusion, literally. If a player wishes, and certain conditions are met, the dead character could transform into an Avatar of one of the Entities. In fact, to become an Avatar, death is actually a requirement (although for some, the death is metaphorical).

Becoming an Avatar, page 89

Scarring: A character that the game system says is dead might just be badly injured. While they can recover given enough time (probably weeks, if not months), they will be forever scarred by the experience, mentally and physically. Being hindered on all visual tasks because they lost an eye, on all physical tasks due to a bum leg, or on all mental tasks after some brain damage, for example, are appropriate results of this kind of traumatic injury, but they aren't so heinous that the character is no longer playable.

This option is best for situations where a character is beloved and the player has played them for some time. This is, after all, a game. While actions have consequences, the point is to have fun, and for some people, losing a long-term character is the opposite of that.

In addition, consider checking with all the players at the table before introducing lingering effects like brain damage and similar maladies they might not want to contend with in a roleplaying game.

> `And here there is something to be said on death. Everyone fears death. Of course they do. Even the most devout must have some apprehension, for however confident they are in a life everlasting with their deity of choice, the concept of eternity is one that the mortal mind recoils from. Be it bliss, torment, or the senseless void, none can actually imagine what it is to die, so it's only right that all should have a healthy fear of it. There are some, though, for whom it is an enduring terror.`
>
> `—MAG 29: "Cheating Death"`

DISTANCE

Most of the time, when talking about distances and sizes of things, you'll want to use whatever language or units you and your players are comfortable with—meters, feet, bigger than a football field, and so on.

When you need to know how far away something is for the mechanical aspects of the game, precise distances are rarely important. What's important is "Can I reach it?" As in:

- "Can I get to the other side of the room and slam the door shut on my turn?"
- "Is the shadowy thing close enough for me to throw a rock at it?"
- "Can I shoot the murderous maniac from where I am in the third-floor window?"
- "How far away do I need to be to not be burned by the burst of fire from the exploding car?"

In cases such as these, distance is simplified into four basic categories: immediate, short, long, and very long.

Immediate distance from a character is within reach or within a few steps; if a character stands in a small room, everything in the room is within immediate distance. At most, immediate distance is 10 feet (3.5 m). Immediate distance is sometimes referred to as close, or even point-blank, particularly when referring to ranges.

Short distance is anything greater than immediate distance but less than 50 feet (16 m) or so.

Long distance is anything greater than short distance but less than 100 feet (30 m) or so.

Very long distance is anything greater than long distance but less than 500 feet (150 m) or so.

Beyond that range, distances are always specified—1,000 feet (300 m), 1 mile (1.6 km), and so on.

All weapons and special abilities use these terms for ranges. For example, all melee weapons have immediate range—they are close-combat weapons, and you can use them

Because The Magnus Archives RPG is played in your (and your friends') imagination, determining exact distances can be tedious if not impossible, so the general categories are used instead. Don't overthink them—use them conversationally. If something's in the same room, it's probably an immediate distance away. A short distance is how far you can cross in a few seconds if you're in a hurry—it's close, but far enough away that you have to think about it. Long and very long are exactly what they sound like.

to attack anyone within immediate distance. A thrown knife (and most other thrown weapons) has short range. A small pocket handgun also has short range. A rifle has long range.

A character can move an immediate distance as a part of another action. In other words, they can take a few steps to the light switch and flip it on. They can lunge across a small room to attack a foe. They can open a door and step through.

A character can move a short distance as their entire action for a turn. They can also try to move a long distance as their entire action, but the player might have to roll to see if the character slips, trips, or stumbles for moving so far so quickly.

GMs and players don't need to determine exact distances. For example, if the PCs are fighting a group of followers of The Dark, any character can likely attack any foe in the general melee—they're all within immediate range. However, if one cultist stays back to fire a gun, a character might have to use their entire action to move the short distance required to attack that foe. It doesn't matter if the cultist is 20 feet (6 m) or 40 feet (12 m) away—it's simply considered short distance. It does matter if the cultist is more than 50 feet (16 m) away because that distance would require a long move.

The Dark, page 171

TIMEKEEPING

Generally, keep time the same way that you normally would, using minutes, hours, days, and weeks. Thus, if the characters walk overland for 15 miles (24 km), about eight hours pass, even though the journey can be described in only a few seconds at the game table. Precision timekeeping is rarely important. Most of the time, saying things like "That takes about an hour" works fine.

This is true even when a special ability has a specific duration. In an encounter, a duration of "one minute" is mostly the same as saying "the rest of the encounter." You don't have to track each round that ticks by if you don't want to. Likewise, an ability that lasts for ten minutes can safely be considered the length of an in-depth conversation, the time it takes to quickly explore a small area, or the time it takes to rest after a strenuous activity.

SPECIAL SITUATION: A CHASE

Running from monsters is usually the right choice. When an NPC is chasing a PC or vice versa, the player should attempt a Speed action, with the difficulty based on the NPC's level. If the PC succeeds at the roll, they catch the NPC (if chasing), or they get away (if chased).

If one of the creatures involved in the chase has a movement speed different from that of the PCs, such as a monster that moves faster or slower, you can modify the task based on the difference. Most PCs have an effective movement of short, so if they are chasing (or being chased by) a monster with immediate movement, their Speed tasks are eased; if the monster's movement is long or greater, the PCs' Speed tasks are hindered.

In terms of the story, this one-roll mechanic can be the result of a long chase over many rounds.

Alternatively, if the GM wants to play out a long chase, the character can make many rolls (perhaps one per level of the NPC) to finish the pursuit successfully. For every failure, the PC must make another success, and if they ever have more failures than successes, the PC fails to catch the NPC (if chasing) or is caught (if chased). As with combat, the GM is encouraged to describe the results of these rolls with flavor. A success might mean the PC has rounded a corner and gained some distance. A failure might mean that a basket of fruit topples over in front of them, slowing them down. Vehicle chases are handled similarly.

TIME REQUIRED FOR ACTIONS

Action	Time Usually Required
Walking a mile over easy terrain	About fifteen minutes
Walking a mile over rough terrain (forest, snow, hills)	About half an hour
Walking a mile over difficult terrain (mountains, thick jungle)	About forty-five minutes
Moving from one significant location in a city to another	About fifteen to thirty minutes
Sneaking into a guarded location	About fifteen minutes
Observing a new location to get salient details	About fifteen minutes
Having an in-depth discussion	About ten minutes
Resting after a fight or other strenuous activity	About ten minutes
Resting and having a quick meal	About half an hour
Making or breaking camp	About half an hour
Shopping for supplies in a store	About an hour
Meeting with an important contact	About half an hour
Referencing a book or website	About half an hour
Searching a room for hidden things	At least half an hour, perhaps one hour
Identifying and understanding an artefact	At least fifteen minutes, perhaps three hours
Repairing a device (assuming parts and tools available)	At least an hour, perhaps a day
Building a device (assuming parts and tools available)	At least a day, perhaps a week

CHAPTER 8

CHARACTER ARCS AND ADVANCEMENT

Characters advance by increasing their tier, affecting both their type and their focus, adding new abilities to each. A character gains a new tier by using experience points (XP) earned to purchase character benefits.

ADVANCING IN TIER

Every character starts the game at the first tier. Tier is a measurement of power, toughness, and ability. Characters can advance up to the sixth tier. As your character advances to higher tiers, you gain more abilities, increase your Effort, and can improve a stat's Edge or increase a stat. Generally speaking, even first-tier characters are already quite capable. It's safe to assume that they've already got some experience under their belt. This is not a "zero to hero" progression, but rather an instance of competent people refining and honing their capabilities and knowledge. But The Magnus Archives Roleplaying Game isn't really about becoming more powerful. Advancing to higher tiers is a representation of how characters progress in a story.

To progress to the next tier, characters earn experience points by pursuing character arcs, going on investigations, and discovering more about the paranormal—the system is about discovery, as well as achieving personal goals. Experience points have many uses, and one use is to purchase character benefits. After your character purchases four character benefits, they advance to the next tier. Each benefit costs 4 XP, and you can purchase them in any order, but you must purchase one of each kind of benefit (and then advance to the next tier) before you can purchase the same benefit again. The four character benefits are as follows.

Increasing Capabilities: You gain 4 points to add to your stat Pools. You can allocate the points among the Pools however you wish.

Moving Toward Perfection: You add 1 to your Might Edge, your Speed Edge, or your Intellect Edge (your choice).

Extra Effort: Your Effort score increases by 1.

Skills: You become trained in one skill of your choice, other than attacks or defense. As described in chapter 2, a character trained in a skill treats the difficulty of a related task as one step lower than normal (also known as easing the task). The skill you choose for this benefit can be anything you wish, but it often fits the story best if it's something you've been practicing in the previous sessions, or something you believe you'll need to improve for the future. If you choose a skill that you are already trained in, you become specialized in that skill, easing related tasks by two steps instead of one.

Other Options: Players can also spend 4 XP to purchase other special options. Selecting one of these options counts as purchasing one of the four stages necessary to advance to the next tier. The other three need to be from the other categories. The special options are as follows:

- Add 2 to your recovery rolls.
- Select another focus ability available to you at tier 3. (You must be tier 3 or higher to do this. Characters advancing beyond tier 6 can use this option to select their other tier 6 focus ability.)
- Select another character ability from your type, such as a tier 2 Protector selecting Bodyguard or Quick Recovery.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

As previously mentioned, experience points are the currency by which players gain benefits for their characters. The most common ways to earn XP are through GM intrusions and by accomplishing things the PCs set out to do. In a typical session, a player might earn 2 to 4 XP. The exact amounts depend on the events of the session.

Aside from GM intrusions, there are other ways for characters to earn XP: character arcs and GM awards.

CHARACTER ARCS

Character arcs are the means by which players can invest themselves more in great stories and character depth and development.

Just like in *The Magnus Archives* podcast, characters progress through their own personal stories and change over time. A PC with a character arc decides for themselves what they do and why. Character arcs are like stated goals for a character, and by progressing toward that goal, the character advances. The key word there is *progressing*. A PC doesn't have to succeed at achieving the goal to earn advancement—it's not an all-or-nothing prospect. Each arc is keyed to a single character, but just like in the podcast, characters can take part in the larger investigation that the whole group participates in while also progressing in their own personal arc.

Character arcs have different steps that mark the character's progress through the arc. Each arc eventually reaches a climax, and then finishes with a step that is a final resolution. Each step reached earns the character 2 XP. Character arcs are the most straightforward way that a character earns XP.

At character creation, a player can choose one character arc for their PC at no cost. Players have the option to not choose one, but it's probably a good idea to do so. First and foremost, it is a character-defining factor. If they begin the campaign with a desire to find the mysterious woman who killed their brother, that says a lot about the character: they had a brother, he was likely close to them, he had been in at least one dangerous situation, and the character is probably motivated by anger and hate, at least somewhat. Even after the character finishes this first arc, they'll undoubtedly have (at least one) more because they can gain new arcs as the campaign progresses.

Once play begins, players can take on a new arc whenever they wish, as fits the character's ongoing story. Taking a new arc has a cost of 1 XP. This initial cost reflects the character's devotion to the goal. They will earn this investment back (probably many times over) if the arc is completed.

While there's no hard limit on how many arcs a character can have at one time, realistically most PCs couldn't reasonably have more than three or four.

Character arcs are always player-driven. A GM cannot force one on a character. That said, the events in the narrative often present story arc opportunities and inspire character arcs for the PCs. It's certainly in the GM's purview to suggest possible arcs related to the events going on. For example, if the GM presents an encounter in which an NPC wishes to learn from the PC, it might make sense to suggest taking the Instruction

As a great example of a character arc, think about Tim from the podcast, who wants to find out what happened to his brother and get revenge on those responsible.

GM Intrusions, page 120

arc. Whether or not the PC takes on the student, the player doesn't have to adopt the Instruction arc unless they want to.

At the end of a session, the players review the actions they took and describe how these actions might equate to the completion of a step (or possibly more than one step) in their character arc. If the GM agrees, the character gets their reward.

This chapter presents many sample character arcs, starting on page 144.

GM AWARDS

Sometimes, a group will have an investigation that doesn't deal primarily with a PC's character arc. In this case, it's a good idea for the GM to award XP to characters for accomplishing other tasks. First and foremost, awards should be based on uncovering the truth about the supernatural (and the Entities).

Player Intrusion, page 121

This can mean establishing the truth of a statement, finding an artefact or book, rooting out a secretive cult or dangerous person involved with the occult, or learning of the existence of a paranormal creature or being.

Artefacts: When the group obtains an artefact, award XP equal to the artefact's level and divide it among the PCs (minimum 1 XP for each character). Round down if necessary. For example, if four PCs discover a level 5 artefact, they each get 1 XP. Money and standard equipment are not worth XP.

Miscellaneous Discoveries: Various other discoveries might grant 1 XP to each PC involved.

Other Awards: If a character is focused on activities that don't relate to a character arc or a discovery, as a general rule, a mission should be worth at least 1 XP per game session involved in accomplishing it. For example, saving a family on an isolated farm beset by shadowy beings might be worth 1 XP for each character. Of course, saving the family doesn't always mean killing the threatening creatures; it might mean driving them off or simply getting the family to safety.

SPENDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Experience points are meant to be used. Hoarding them is not a good idea; if a player accumulates more than 10 XP, the GM can require them to spend some.

Generally, experience points can be spent in four ways: immediate benefits, short- and medium-term benefits, long-term benefits, and character advancement.

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

Another way for a player to use XP is to reroll any roll in the game—even one that they didn't make. This costs 1 XP per reroll, and the player chooses the best result. They can continue to spend XP on rerolls, but this can quickly become an expensive proposition. It's a fine way to try to prevent disaster, but it's not a good idea to use a lot of XP to reroll a single action over and over.

A player can also spend 1 XP to refuse a GM intrusion or to instigate their own player intrusion.

SHORT- AND MEDIUM-TERM BENEFITS

By spending 2 XP, a character can gain a skill—or, more rarely, an ability—that provides a short-term benefit. Let's say a character notices that the computer terminals in the facility they're infiltrating are similar to those used by the company they once worked for. They spend 2 XP and say that they have a great deal of experience in using these. As a result, they are trained in operating (and breaking into) these computers. This is just like being trained in programming, but it applies only to computers found in that particular location. The skill is extremely useful in the facility, but nowhere else.

Medium-term benefits are usually story based. For example, a character can spend 2 XP while climbing through mountains and say that they have experience with climbing in regions like these, or perhaps they spend the XP after they've been in the mountains for a while and say that they've picked up the feel for climbing there. Either way, from now on, they're trained in climbing in those mountains. This helps them now and any time they return to the area, but they're not trained in climbing everywhere.

This method allows a character to get immediate training in a skill for half the normal cost. (Normally, it costs 4 XP to become trained in a skill.) It's also a way to gain a new skill even if the PC has already gained a new skill as a step toward attaining the next tier.

In rare cases, a GM might allow a character to spend 2 XP to gain an entirely new ability—such as a device or a special power—for a short time, usually no longer than the course of one scenario. The player and the GM should agree on a story-based explanation for the benefit. Perhaps the ability has a specific rare requirement, such as a tool, a battery, a drug, or some kind of treatment. For example, a character wants to resist the heat generated by a cultist of the Lightless Flame, and they spend 2 XP to cobble together some protective garb that protects them from excessive heat—basically reducing the serious injury they would suffer from the cultist's touch to a mere 1 point of Stress. This protects them for a considerable length of time, but not permanently—the garb might work for only eight hours. Again, the story and the logic of the situation dictate the parameters.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS

In many ways, the long-term benefits a PC can gain by spending XP are a means of integrating the mechanics of the game with the story. Players can codify things that happen to their characters by talking to the GM and spending 3 XP.

Things that a PC can acquire as a long-term benefit can be thought of as being story based, and they allow the player to have some narrative control over the story. In the course of play, a player might decide that their character gains a friend (a contact) or builds a log cabin off the grid (a home). Because a player spent XP, however, they should have some agency over what they've gained, and it shouldn't be easily taken away. The player should help come up with the details of the contact or the design of their home.

It's also possible to gain these benefits through events in the story, without spending XP. The new contact comes to the PC and starts the relationship. The new home is inherited from a dead relative. However, because these came from the GM and not the player (and no XP were spent), the player has no narrative control over them and the GM makes up the details.

Long-term benefits can include the following.

Contact: The character gains a long-term NPC contact of importance—someone who will help them with information, equipment, or physical tasks. The player and GM should work out the details of the relationship.

Home: The PC acquires a full-time residence. This can be an apartment in a city, a cabin in the wilderness, a secret hidey hole in a basement, or whatever fits the situation. It should be a secure place where the PC can leave their belongings and sleep soundly. Several characters could combine their XP and buy a home together.

Title or job: The PC is granted a position of importance or authority. This promotion is very likely within the Magnus Institute or a similar organization that the PCs work for. The details should be worked out between the player and the GM. This position might come with responsibilities, prestige, and rewards, or it might be an honorary title. It could even mean the player becomes the new archivist. Alternatively, the position could be in another organization, such as the local police force, a big company, or the top spot on the ghost-hunting podcast they work on.

Wealth: The PC comes into a considerable amount of wealth, whether it's a windfall, an inheritance, or a gift. It might be enough to buy a home or a title, but that's not really the point. The main benefit is that the PC no longer needs to worry about the cost of simple equipment, lodging, food, and so on. This wealth could mean a set amount—perhaps 100,000 dollars—or it could bestow the ability to ignore minor costs, as decided by the player and GM.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

The most straightforward way to use XP is to gain benefits that contribute to advancing a character's tier.

EQUAL ADVANCEMENT

It's worthwhile if all characters advance through the six tiers at about the same rate—an important issue for some players. A good GM can achieve this result by carefully handing out XP rewards, some during play (which will tend to get used immediately) and some after play concludes, especially after completing a major story arc or quest so the GM can hand out 4 XP in one go (which will tend to get used for advancement). Many groups will discover while playing that equal advancement isn't an important issue in The Magnus Archives RPG, but people should get to play the game the way they want to play it.

SAMPLE CHARACTER ARCS

The rest of this chapter presents sample character arcs for PCs. The writeup of each arc describes the parts involved in progressing through the arc:

Opening: This sets the stage for the rest of the arc. It involves some action, although that might just be the PC agreeing to do the task or undertake the mission. It usually has no reward.

Step(s): This is the action required to move toward the climax. In story terms, this is the movement through the bulk of the arc. It's the journey. The rising tension. Although there might be just one step, there might also be many, depending on the story told. Each results in a reward of 2 XP.

Climax: This is the finale—the point at which the PC likely succeeds or fails at what they've set out to do. Not every arc ends with victory. If the character is successful, they earn a reward of 4 XP. If they fail, they still earn a reward of 2 XP. If a character fails the climax, they very likely ignore the resolution.

Resolution: This is the wrap-up or denouement. It's a time for the character to reflect on what happened, tie up any loose ends, and figure out what happens next. When things are more or less resolved, the character earns a 1 XP reward.

Within the arc, most of the time a part is probably optional, depending on the situation—although it's hard to envision most arcs without some kind of opening, climax, or resolution. Steps other than the opening, the climax, and the resolution can be done in any order.

Character arcs should always take at least weeks in game time, and no more than two parts in an arc should be accomplished in a game session (and most of the time, it should be one part, if any). If neither of these two things is true, then it's not really a character arc. You can't, for example, use the Creation arc to guide you through something you can make in an hour or two.

The following are common character arcs that you can choose for your character. If you and the GM want to make a new one, it should be fairly easy after looking through these models.

AID A FRIEND

Someone needs your help.

When a PC friend takes a character arc, you can select this arc to help them with whatever their arc is (if appropriate). The steps and climax depend entirely on their chosen arc. If the friend is an NPC, the steps and climax are lifted from another arc appropriate to whatever they seek to do.

It's difficult, but possible, to aid a friend with an arc even if that friend is unwilling to accept (or is ignorant of) your help.

The cost and rewards for a character with this arc are the same as those described in the original character arc.

Opening: Answering the call. Offering to help (or responding to a request for help).

Step(s) and Climax: Depends on the friend's arc. Rewards are the same for you as for the friend.

Resolution: You speak with your friend and learn if they are satisfied. Together, you share what you've learned (if anything) and where you will go from here.

ASSIST AN ORGANIZATION

You set out to accomplish something that will further an organization. You're probably allied with them, you work for them, or they are rewarding you for your help in some fashion. If this arc is selected in respect to the organization that the PCs work for (perhaps the Magnus Institute), the arc should cover a specific task, so that it can have an obvious beginning, middle, and end.

Opening: Responding to the call. You work out all the details of what's expected of you, and what rewards (if any) you might get. You also get the specifics of what's required to join and advance.

Step: Sizing up the task. This requires some action. A reconnaissance mission. An investigation.

Step(s): Undertaking the task. Because this arc can vary so widely based on the task involved, there might be multiple steps like this one.

Climax: Completing the task.

Resolution: Collecting your reward (if any) and conferring with the people in the organization that you spoke to. Perhaps getting access to higher-ranking people in the organization. You can choose to have your connection to the organization increase rather than take the standard reward.

AVENGE

Someone close to you or important to you in some way has been wronged. The most overt version of this arc would be to avenge someone's death. Avenging is different than revenge, as revenge is personal—you are the wronged party. But in the Avenge character arc, you are avenging a wrong done to someone else. For instance, if Monster Pig eats a character's old friend, the character may decide to avenge that death.

Monster Pig, page 229

Opening: Declaration. You publicly declare that you are going to avenge the victim(s). This is optional.

Step(s): Tracking the guilty. You track down the guilty party. This might not be physically finding them if you already know where they are. Instead, it might be discovering a way to get at them if they are distant, difficult to reach, or well protected. This step might be repeated multiple times, if applicable.

Step: Finding the guilty. You finally find the guilty party, or find a path or make a plan to reach them. Now all that's left is to confront them.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the guilty party. This might be a public accusation and demonstration of guilt, a trial, or an attack to kill, wound, or apprehend them—whatever you choose to be appropriate.

Resolution: You resolve the outcome and the ramifications of the confrontation and decide what to do next.

BIRTH

You are becoming a parent.

The Birth character arc assumes you already have a partner or a surrogate. If you want your character to find a romantic partner or spouse, you can use the Romance arc. And of course, nonhuman characters might reproduce in other ways.

A player may be concerned about taking the Birth arc for their character given the larger context of the game. As the GM, let them know whether the informal rule of the podcast—that children and animals always end up all right—applies for your game.

This arc is usually followed by the Raise a Child arc.

Opening: Impregnation.

Step: Finding a caretaker. This might be a physician, midwife, doula, or similar person. This is optional.

Step: Complication. A complication arises that threatens the pregnancy, the birth parent, or both.

Step: Preparation. You prepare a place for the delivery as well as a safe place for the infant to live once born.

Climax: Delivery. The baby is born. Success means the child survives.

Resolution: You get the baby to the place you have prepared and settle in, deciding what to do next.

BUILD

You are going to build a physical structure—a house, a workshop, a lab, and so on. This arc would also cover renovating an existing structure or substantially adding to one. You might be hiring builders or contractors to help or do the work for you, but working with them is still a part of your arc. For instance, a character might decide that the institute employing them needs a dedicated MRI machine to check for signs of a new kind of corruption.

In some situations, the PCs might be forced to set up their own base of operations if they discover that the organization they conduct investigations for has been compromised.

Opening: Make a plan. This almost certainly involves literally drawing up blueprints or plans.

Step(s): Find a site. This might be extremely straightforward—a simple examination of the site—or it might be an entire exploratory adventure. (If the latter, it might involve multiple such steps.)

Step(s): Gather materials. Depending on what you are building and what it's made out of, this could involve multiple steps. There probably are substantial costs involved as well.

Step(s): Construction. Depending on what you are building, this could involve multiple steps. It might also take a considerable amount of time and work.

Climax: Completion. The structure is finished.

Resolution: You put the structure to its desired use and see if it holds up.

CLEANSE

Someone or something has been contaminated by supernatural forces, and you want to rid them of such influences. This could also be a curse, a possession, an infestation, or something else, such as a plague of silver worms in the attic.

Opening: Analyze the threat. You determine the nature of the contamination.

Step: Find the solution. Almost every contamination has its own particular solution, and this likely involves research and consultation.

Step: Getting ready. The solution probably involves materials, spells, or other things that you must gather and prepare.

Climax: The cleansing. You confront the contamination.

Resolution: You reflect on the events that have transpired and what effects they might have on the future. How can you keep this from happening again?

CREATION

You want to make something. This might be a painting, a novel, a machine, or even an artefact. The creation might be for the character's personal development, or it could be more central to the situation, such as an Occultist wanting to build an arcane machine that detects watchful spiders sent by The Web.

Opening: Make a plan. You figure out what you need, what you're going to do, and how you're going to do it.

Step(s): Gather materials. Depending on what you are creating and what it's made out of, this could involve multiple steps. There probably are substantial costs involved as well.

Step(s): Progress. Depending on what you are creating, this could involve multiple steps. It might also take a considerable amount of time and work.

Climax: Completion. It's finished! Is it what you wanted? Does it work?

Resolution: You think about what you have learned from the process and use or enjoy the fruits of your labor.

DEFEAT A FOE

Someone stands in your way or is threatening you. You must overcome the challenge they represent. Defeat doesn't always mean kill or even fight. Defeating a foe could mean beating them in a chess match or in a race to find a specific long-lost book. Or something as monumental as trying to prevent a new Avatar of The Buried from attempting the Sunken Sky ritual.

Opening: Sizing up the competition. This requires some action. A reconnaissance mission. An investigation.

Step: Investigation. This requires some action. A reconnaissance mission. An investigation.

Step(s): Diving in. You travel toward your opponent, overcome their lackeys, or take steps to reach them so you can confront them. This step can take many forms, and there might be more than one such step. This step is always active.

Climax: Confrontation. The contest, challenge, fight, or confrontation occurs.

Resolution: You reflect on what you've learned and what the consequences of your actions might be.

DEFENSE

A person, place, or thing is threatened, and you want to protect it. For example, a character linked with the fractal pot knows that if it's destroyed (or if someone attempts to destroy it), an aspect of The Stranger will come for them. Unfortunately, an enemy Avatar knows the same thing and is making plans for the pot's destruction.

Opening: Analyze the situation. What are you defending, and what threats are involved?

Step: Account for your resources. How are you going to defend?

Step(s): Fend off danger. The forces threatening what you are protecting probably make an initial threat that you'll have to defeat. It's not the main threat, though. There might be multiple such initial threats.

Climax: Protect. The true threat reveals itself and you confront it.

Resolution: A time for reflection on everything that occurred, and an assessment of the person, place, or thing's safety going forward.

Silver worm, page 237

Ritual, page 168

Sometimes, a Cleanse arc is impossible from the outset. Helping someone who has been replaced by a NotThem (page 230) is an arc doomed to failure. That doesn't mean it's a bad arc.

Fractal pot, page 258

Defending the archives against The Corruption in season 1 of the podcast is a good example of a Defense arc.

DEVELOP A BOND

You want to get closer to another character. This might be to make a friend, find a mentor, or establish a contact in a position of power. It might be to turn a friend into a much closer friend. The character might be an NPC or a PC. If an NPC, a character may want to develop a bond with The Jigsaw Lady. Perhaps that's an unwise choice, but not all arcs succeed.

The Jigsaw Lady, page 223

Opening: Getting to know you. You learn what you can about the other character.

Step: Initial attempt. You attempt to make contact. This might involve sending messages or gifts through a courier, using an intermediary, or just going up and saying hello, depending on the situation.

Step(s): Building a relationship. There might be many such steps as you develop the relationship.

Climax: Bond. You succeed or fail at forging the bond.

Resolution: You enjoy the fruits of your new relationship.

ENTERPRISE

You want to create and run a business or start an organization. Maybe you want to start your own podcast detailing your investigations into the supernatural. Maybe you like baking and you want to start a catering service. Or maybe you want to start a secret society to oppose the Entities. You'll almost certainly have to make new connections, find (and somehow pay for) a location, and deal with all manner of administrative duties.

Opening: Drawing up a plan. What's your goal, and how are you going to achieve it?

Step: Account for your resources. How much financing does the enterprise need compared to what you've got? If you need more, how will you get it? How many people other than yourself are needed to begin, and how many will you need to sustain things once they're up and running?

Step: Finding a location. You probably need a place to run your enterprise—a store, a workshop, a base of operations, and so on. You find a location and look into what it will take to buy or rent it.

Step(s): Building the enterprise. You procure the needed equipment or personnel. You make the connections and deals to get things started. You obtain important permits or other legal documents. You test new products. You actually start the business. Each of these developments (and likely others) can be counted as a separate step, so there will be many steps.

Climax: Profit and loss. You determine whether your enterprise will take off and carry on into the future, or fall apart before it gets a chance to blossom. This occurs in a single dramatic moment—your first major client, your organization's first big meeting or mission, or whatever else is appropriate.

Resolution: A time for reflection on everything that occurred, and how you're going to move forward.

ESTABLISHMENT

You want to prove yourself as someone of importance. This can take many forms—socially, within your occupation, financially, or even romantically. For example, a character may wish to establish themselves as a paramount researcher within their institute's investigation arm.

Opening: Assessment. You assess yourself as well as who you need to prove yourself to.

Step(s): Appearances matter. You improve your look. Enhance your wardrobe. Spruce up your house. Whatever it takes to get attention from the right people. There might be many such steps.

Step(s): Self-aggrandizement. You need to get the word out to get people talking about you. There might be many such steps.

Climax: Grabbing attention. You do something big, like host a party for influential people or produce a play that you wrote. You make a big splash or a big crash.

Resolution: You reflect on what you did and where you go from here.

EXPLORE

Something out there is unknown and you want to explore its secrets. This is most likely an area of wilderness, a hidden location (like a lost city or an island that shouldn't exist), or even an otherworldly dimension created by one of the Entities, such as some part of The Distortion's maze.

Opening: Make a plan. Not only do you draw up a plan for your exploration, but if appropriate, you also make a formal declaration to relevant parties of what you're going to do.

Step(s): Gather resources. You get the supplies, vehicles, and help you need. Depending on where you're going and what is required, this could involve multiple steps. There probably are substantial costs involved as well.

Step(s): Travel. You go where you wish to explore. There might be many such steps, depending on how long it takes to get there.

Step(s): Exploration. This is the meat of the arc, but it's probably a series of small moves and minor victories. There might be many such steps.

Climax: Conquest. You make the big discovery or truly master the area. You might not have explored every inch of the place, but if you're successful, you can claim to be done.

Resolution: You return home and possibly share your findings.

FALL FROM GRACE

This is an odd character arc in that it's (presumably) not something that a character would want. It is something that a player selects on a meta level for the character because it makes for an interesting story. It also sets up the potential for future arcs, such as Redemption. It's important that this involve actions you take. For example, you fall into substance abuse. You treat people badly. You make mistakes that endanger others. You ally yourself with the People's Church of the Divine Host. In other words, the fall isn't orchestrated by someone else—it's all your own doing.

Opening: The descent. Things go bad.

Step(s): Further descent. Things get worse. Depending on the situation, this might involve many steps.

Step: Lashing out. You treat others poorly as you descend.

Climax: Rock bottom. There is no chance for success here. Only failure.

Resolution: You wallow in your own misery.

FINISH A GREAT WORK

Something that was begun in the past must now be completed. This might involve destroying an artefact such as the pestilent scalpel, finishing the construction of a monument, organizing an archive with an uncatalogued collection of files, or uncovering a lost temple forgotten to the ages.

Pestilent scalpel, page 261

Jonathan Sims's attempts at organizing Gertrude's archives and his efforts to stop the various rituals as she did are both good examples of the Finish a Great Work arc.

Opening: Assessing the past. You look at what has come before and where it still needs to go. This almost certainly involves some real research.

Step: Conceive a plan. You make a plan on how to move forward.

Step(s): Progress. You make significant progress or overcome a barrier to completion. This may involve multiple such steps.

Climax: Completion. This involves the big finish to the past work.

Resolution: You reflect on what you did and where you go from here.

GROWTH

Willingly or unwillingly, you are going to change. This is another meta arc. It's less about a goal and more about character development. While it's possible that the growth involved is intentional, in most people's lives and stories, it is emergent. A character might become less selfish, braver, or a better leader, or experience some other form of growth.

Opening: The beginning. Change usually begins slowly, in a small, almost imperceptible way.

Step(s): Change. Growth involves many small steps.

Step: Overcoming an obstacle. The temptation to resort to your old ways is always present.

Climax: Self-evident change. This is a dramatic about-face. This is the moment where you do something the "old you" would never have done, and it has a profound effect on you and those around you. With either success or failure, growth is possible.

Resolution: You recognize the change in yourself and move forward.

INSTRUCTION

You teach a pupil. You have knowledge on a topic and are willing to share. This can be a skill, an area of lore, a combat style, or the use of a special ability. This is usually a fairly long-term arc. Sometimes teaching a pupil is a side matter, and sometimes the pupil takes on more of an apprentice role and spends a great deal of time with you, traveling with you and perhaps even living in your house (or you living in theirs). For example, you may decide (or be asked) to mentor a new member of your institute.

Opening: Taking on the student.

Step: Getting to know them. You assess your pupil's strengths and weaknesses and try to get an idea of what they need to learn and how you can teach it to them.

Step(s): The lessons. Teaching is often a slow, gradual process.

Step: Breakdown. Many times, a student needs to have a moment of crisis to really learn something. Maybe they get dejected, or maybe they rebel against your teaching techniques.

Climax: Graduation. This is when you recognize that the pupil has learned what they need. It usually comes at a dramatic moment.

Resolution: You and the pupil say your goodbyes, and you look toward the future.

JOIN AN ORGANIZATION

You want to join an organization. This might be anything from getting a job at a major corporation to infiltrating a cult (such as the Cult of the Lightless Flame) to joining a secret police force that takes on supernatural cases.

Opening: Getting the details. You learn all you can about the organization and how one becomes a member.

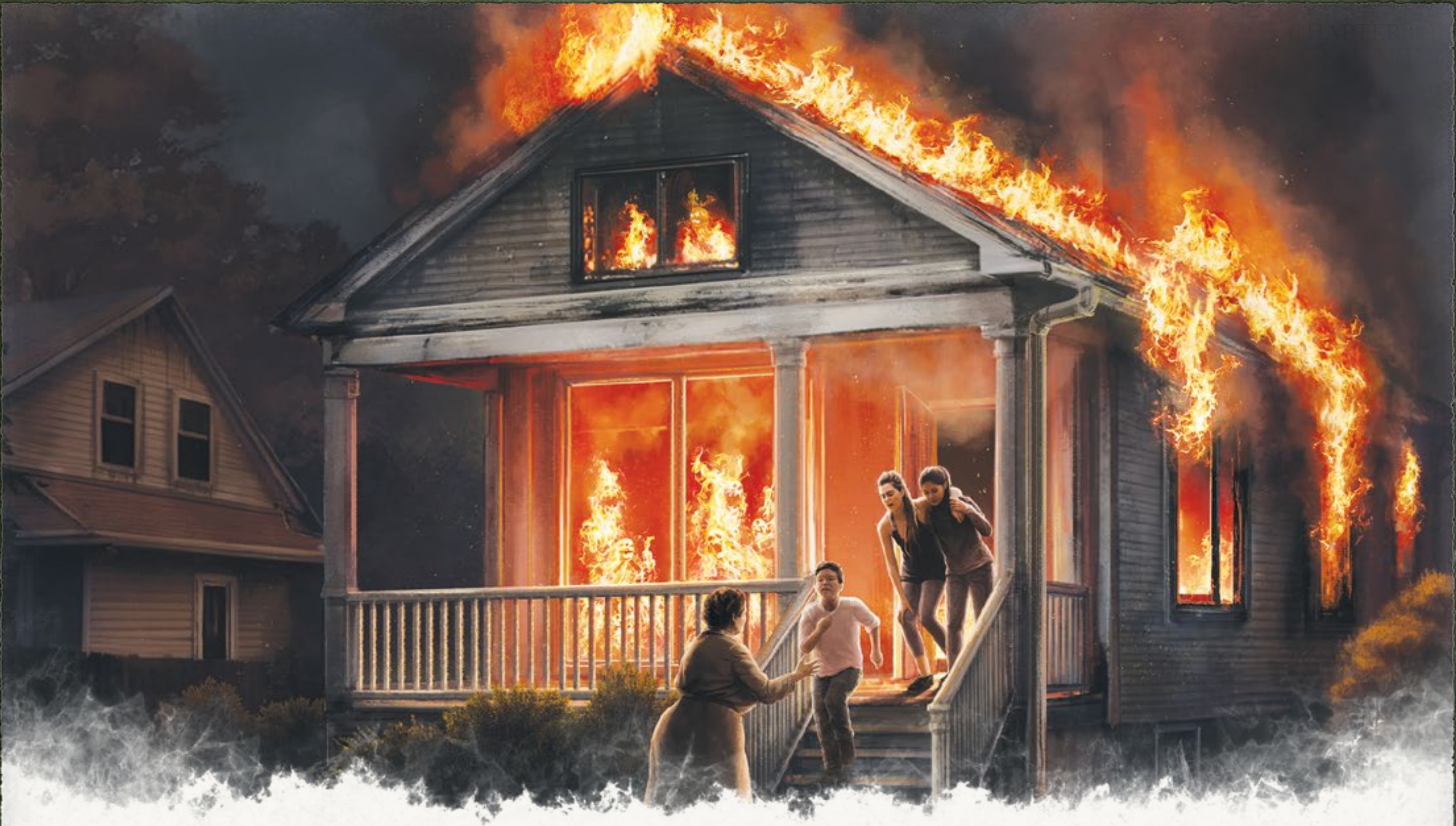
Step(s): Making a contact. Friends on the inside are always important.

Step(s): Performing a deed. The organization might want to test your worth, or this might be a ceremony you must take part in. It might include paying some sort of dues or fee. Or all of these things.

Climax: Proving your worth. This is the point at which you attempt to show the organization that they would be better off with you as a member.

Resolution: You consider your efforts and assess what your membership gets you.

Vigilo-Opperior-Audio



JUSTICE

You try to right a wrong or bring a wrongdoer to justice. Hunting down and destroying a vampire can be gaining justice, but so can turning over evidence of a smuggling operation to the police. It can even be taking in a family whose home was destroyed in a fire started by The Chosen of Flame.

Opening: Declaration. You publicly declare that you are going to bring justice in this situation. This is optional.

Step(s): Tracking the guilty. You track down the guilty party, assuming there is one. This might not be physically finding them if you already know where they are. Instead, it might be discovering a way to get at them if they are distant, difficult to reach, or well protected. This step might be repeated multiple times, if applicable.

Step: Helping the victim. Righting a wrong does not always involve confronting a wrongdoer. Part of it might be about helping those who were wronged.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the guilty party. This might be a public accusation and demonstration of guilt, a trial, or an attack to kill, wound, or apprehend them—whatever you choose to be appropriate.

Resolution: You resolve the outcome and ramifications of the confrontation and decide what to do next.

LEARN

You want to learn something. This isn't the same as the Uncover a Secret arc, in which you're looking for a bit of information. This is a skill or whole area of knowledge you want to gain proficiency with. This is learning a new language, how to play an instrument, or how to be a good cook. Thus, it's not about gaining a skill rank in endurance, but about learning to be an experienced skydiver (which might come in handy if encounters with servants of The Vast are in the offing).

Opening: Focusing on the problem.

Step: Finding a teacher or a way to teach yourself. Now you can truly begin.

Step(s): Learn. Depending on what you're learning, this could involve one step or quite a few.

Climax: The test. You put your new knowledge to the test in a real situation.

Resolution: You relax a bit and decide what to do next.

MASTER A SKILL

You're skilled, but you want to become the best. This arc might logically follow the Learn arc. As with the Learn arc, this can involve any kind of training at all, not just a skill.

Opening: Finding the path. You've learned the basics. Now it's time for the advanced material.

Step: Discovering a master. You find a master to help you become a master.

Step(s): Learn. Depending on what you're mastering, this could involve one step or quite a few.

Step: The last step. Eventually, you realize that even a master cannot teach you the last step. You must learn it on your own.

Climax: The test. You put your mastery to the test in a real situation—and considering your goal, it's probably a very important situation.

Resolution: You relax a bit and decide what to do next.

MYSTERIOUS BACKGROUND

You don't know who your parents were, but you want to find out. You saw something terrifying as a child and now that you're an adult, you want to learn what it was. Maybe you were born with a mysterious mark on the back of your neck that resembles a bewebbed occult symbol, and you want to learn why. In any case, you want to know where you come from—there's some kind of mystery in your past.

Opening: Beginning the search.

Step: Research. You look into your own family background, if possible.

Step(s): Investigation. You talk to people who might know. You follow clues.

Climax: Discovery. You discover the secret of your own background. You decide if what you learn is good or bad, but either way, discovery means success.

Resolution: You contemplate how this new knowledge sits with you.

NEW DISCOVERY

You want to invent a new device, process, spell, or something similar. A cure for a heretofore unknown disease spawned by The Corruption? An occult invocation with a result you've never heard of before? A method for getting into (and safely out of) the coffin of The Buried? Any of these and more could be your discovery. While similar to the Creation arc and the Learn arc, the New Discovery arc involves blazing a new trail. No one can teach you what you want to know. You've got to do it on your own.

Opening: The idea. You draw up plans for the thing you want to invent or discover.

Step: Research. You learn what people have done before and recognize where they fell short.

Step(s): Trial and error. You test your hypothesis. This often ends in many failures before you get a success.

Climax: Eureka! It's time to put the discovery to the true test.

Resolution: You reflect on your discovery and probably compile your notes and write it all down, for posterity's sake if nothing else.

RAISE A CHILD

You raise a child to adulthood. It can be your biological child or one you adopt. It can even be a child taken under your wing, more a young protégé than a son or daughter. This is obviously a very long-term arc.

Opening: Sharing your home. The child now lives with you.

Step: Care and feeding. You learn to meet the child's basic needs.

Step(s): Basic instruction. You teach them to walk, talk, and read. You teach them to care for themselves.

Step(s): The rewards are many. The child loves you. Relies on you. Trusts you. Eventually, helps you.

Step(s): Ethical instruction. You instill your basic ethics in the child, hoping that they will mature into an adult you can be proud of.

Climax: Adulthood. At some point the child leaves the proverbial nest. You determine, at this point, your own success or failure.

Resolution: You reflect on the memories you have made.

RECOVER FROM A WOUND (OR TRAUMA)

You need to heal. This isn't just for healing simple damage. This involves recovering from a major debilitating injury, illness, or shock, maybe after an encounter with The Chosen of Flame. Severe damage, the loss of a body part, and emotional trauma all fall into this category.

Opening: Rest. The first thing you need to do is rest.

Step: Self-care. You take care of your own needs.

Step: Getting aid. Someone helps.

Step: Medicine. Some kind of drug, cure, poultice, potion, or remedy aids your recovery.

Step: Therapy. With the help of someone else, you exercise your injury or cope with your trauma.

Climax: Acceptance or recovery. You try to move on and use what has been damaged (or learn how to function without it).

Resolution: You get on with your life.

REDEMPTION

You've done something very wrong, but you want to atone and make it right again. This is like the Justice arc or the Undo a Wrong arc, except you are the wrongdoer. This could be a follow-up to the Fall From Grace arc, when you want to make up for allying yourself with the People's Church of the Divine Host.

Opening: Regret. You are determined to rebuild, recover, and restore.

Step: Forgiveness. You apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Step: Identifying the needs. You determine what needs to be done to atone for your transgression.

Climax: Making good. You perform an act that you hope will redeem your past misdeed.

Resolution: You reflect on what has happened but now look to the future.

REPAY A DEBT

You owe someone something, and it's time to make good. For instance, maybe The Vampire Hunter helped you survive a plague of vampires and has since made it clear they could use some help in return.

The Vampire Hunter, page 244

Opening: Debts come due. You determine to do what is needed to make good on the debt. It might involve repaying money, but more appropriately, it's performing a deed or a series of deeds.

Step: Talking it over. You discuss the matter with the person you owe, if possible. You ensure that what you're doing is what they want.

Climax: Repayment. Either you do something to earn the money or goods you owe, or you undertake a major task that will compensate the other person.

Resolution: You relax knowing that your debt is repaid, and you look to the future.

RESCUE

Someone or something of great importance has been taken, and you want to get them or it back. For instance, maybe a couple of deliverymen threw your best mate into a van and drove off. Now it's on you to get them back.

Opening: Heeding the call. You determine what has happened, and who or what is missing.

Step: Tracking. You discover who has taken them, and where.

Step: Travel. You go to where they are being held and get information on the location and who is involved. Maybe make a plan.

Climax: Rescue operation. You go in and get them.

Resolution: You return them home.

Flawed protagonists are a cornerstone of Magnus Archives–style horror, and thus the Redemption arc might be called upon frequently in the game. That said, redemption is like a marriage, not a proposal. The best kinds of redemption involve people who continue committing to the redemption rather than making a single act of atonement.

If the object of your romantic interest is another PC, make sure you get consent from the other player before taking the Romance arc.

Solve a Mystery is very likely the most common arc chosen by characters in The Magnus Archives RPG, and that's okay.

RESTORATION

You're down but not out. You want to restore your good name. Recover what you've lost. Rebuild what has been destroyed. You've fallen down or have been knocked down, but either way, you want to pick yourself up. This is a possible follow-up to the Fall From Grace arc, or perhaps you can take this arc if your institute is infiltrated or completely destroyed.

Opening: Vow to yourself. You are determined to rebuild, recover, and restore.

Step(s): Work. You rebuild, recover, and restore. If all your money was stolen, you make more. If your house was destroyed, you rebuild it. If your reputation was tarnished, you perform deeds that restore your good name.

Climax: The final act. You undertake one last major task that will bring things back to where they were (or close to it). A lot is riding on this moment.

Resolution: You enjoy a return to things the way they were before.

REVENGE

Someone did something that harmed you. Unlike the Avenge arc, this arc probably isn't about tracking down a murderer, but it might involve pursuing someone who stole from you, hurt you, or otherwise brought you grief. The key is that it's personal. Otherwise, use the Justice arc. For instance, maybe an artefact dealer named Mikaele Salesa sold you what turned out to be a horribly cursed object that led to the deaths of people you know.

Opening: Vow. You swear revenge.

Step(s): Finding a clue. You find a clue to tracking down the culprit.

Climax: Confrontation. You confront the culprit.

Resolution: You deal with the aftermath of the confrontation and move on. You think about whether you are satisfied by gaining your revenge.

ROMANCE

You want to strike up a relationship with a romantic partner. Perhaps you have a specific person in mind, or maybe you're just interested in a relationship in general.

Opening(s): Caught someone's eye. You meet someone you are interested in. (Since this can be short-lived, it's possible to have this opening occur more than once.)

Step(s): Courtship. You begin seeing the person regularly. Although not every "date" is a step in the arc, significant moments are, and there may be a few of them.

Climax: Commitment. You may or may not be interested in a monogamous relationship. Regardless, you and your love have made some kind of commitment to each other.

Resolution: You think about the future. Marriage? Children? These are only some of the possibilities.

SOLVE A MYSTERY

Different from the Learn arc and the Uncover a Secret arc, this arc is about solving a crime or a similar action committed in the fairly recent past. It's not about practice or study, but about questions and answers. In theory, the mystery doesn't have to be a crime. It might be "Why is this strange caustic substance leaking into my basement?" or "Why does it seem like more and more people I meet have no inner life at all, no actual subjective experience?"

Opening: Pledging to solve the mystery.

Step: Research. You get some background.

Step(s): Investigation. You ask questions. You look for clues. You cast divinations. This likely encompasses many such steps.

Climax: Discovery. You come upon what you believe to be the solution to the mystery.

Resolution: In this step, which is far more active than most resolutions, you confront the people involved in the mystery with what you've discovered, or you use the information in some way (such as taking it to the proper authorities).

THEFT

Someone else has something you want, or something they absolutely should not have. For instance, you acquired one of Death's game pieces at great personal cost, but now someone has stolen it from you, and you'd like it back.

Opening: Setting your sights. You make a plan.

Step: Casing the joint. You scout out the location of the thing (or learn its location).

Step(s): Getting to the object. Sometimes, many steps are involved before you reach the object you wish to take. For example, if, in order to steal something from a vault, you need to approach one of the guards while they're off duty and bribe them to look the other way when you break in, that's covered in this step.

Climax: The attempt. You make your heist.

Resolution: You decide what to do with the thing you've stolen and contemplate the repercussions you might face for stealing it.

TRAIN A CREATURE

You want to domesticate and train an animal. While the beast doesn't need to be wild, it must not already be domesticated and trained. For instance, maybe you want to obtain an animal friend for your friend's cat, The Admiral, from a nearby animal shelter.

Opening: Getting acquainted. You get to know the animal a bit, and it gets to know you.

Step: Research. You get information on the type of animal or advice from others who have trained one.

Step: Domestication. After some work, the creature is no longer a threat to you or anyone else, and it can live peacefully in your home or wherever you wish.

Step(s): Training. Each time you use this step, you teach the animal a new, significant command that it will obey regularly and immediately.

Climax: Completion. Believing the animal's training to be complete, you put it in a situation where that is put to the test.

Resolution: You reflect on the experience.

Death's game piece, page 256

TRANSFORMATION

You want to be different in a specific way. Because the Growth arc covers internal change, this one focuses primarily on external change. This could take many forms, from wanting to be more physically fit to becoming an Avatar. For the change to be an arc, it should be difficult and perhaps risky.

Opening: Deciding on the transformation.

Step: Research. You look into how the change can be made and what it entails.

Step(s): Investigation. This is an active step toward making the change. It might involve getting more information, materials or ingredients, or something else.

Climax: Change. You make the change, with some risk of failure or disaster.

Resolution: You contemplate how this change affects you going forward.

UNCOVER A SECRET

There is knowledge out there that you want. It could be an attempt to find and learn a specific special ability. This could also be a search for a lost key to an important safe deposit box that holds clues regarding The Hunt's next ritual, the true leader of a secret cult, the secret background of an important person (such as Jurgen Leitner), or how the ancients constructed that strange monolith.

Jurgen Leitner: see The Book Collector, page 202

Opening: Naming the secret. You give your goal a name. "I am seeking the legendary Draganov formula for creating an elixir that will ward off werewolves."

Step(s): Research. You scour libraries and old tomes for clues and information.

Step(s): Investigation. You talk to people to gain clues and information.

Step(s): Tracking. You track down the source of the secret information and travel to it.

Climax: Revelation. You find and attempt to use the secret, whatever that entails.

Resolution: You contemplate how this secret affects you and the world.

UNDO A WRONG

Someone did something horrible, and its ramifications are still felt, even if it happened long ago. You seek to undo the damage, or at least stop it from continuing.

This is different from the Justice arc because this isn't about justice (or even revenge). It's about literally undoing something bad that happened in the past, such as rebuilding a family's home that burned down (as opposed to merely taking them in), cleaning out a basement filled with cockroaches spread by an Avatar of The Corruption, or restoring a long-missing artefact stolen from a museum.

Opening: Vowing to put right what once went wrong.

Step: Make a plan. You learn all you can about the situation and then make a plan to put things right.

Step(s): Progress. This is an active step toward undoing the wrong. It might involve finding something, defeating someone, destroying something, building something, or almost anything else, depending on the circumstances.

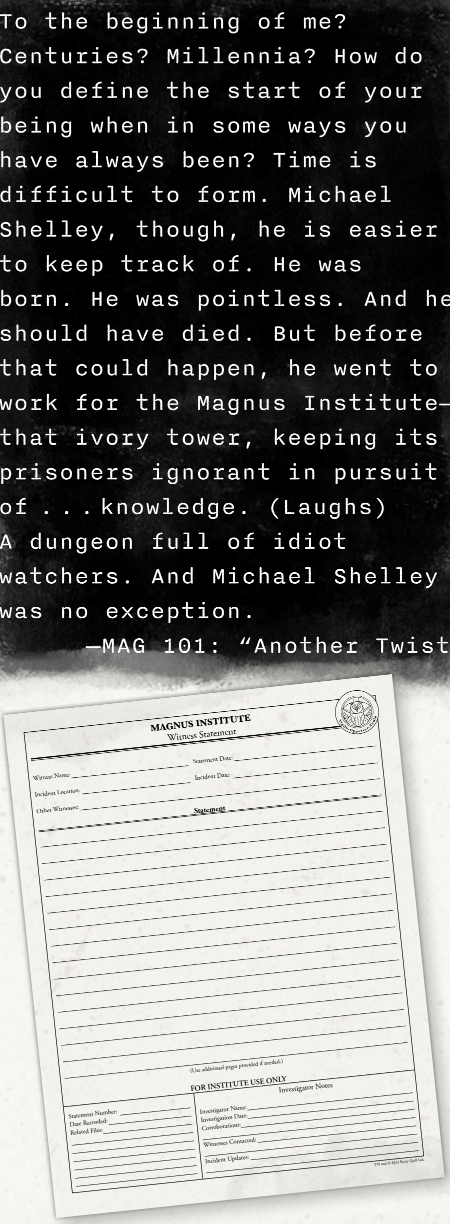
Climax: Change. You face the challenge of the former wrong, and either overcome it or fail.

Resolution: You reflect on what you've accomplished and think about the future.

CHAPTER 9

THE STATEMENT

> How far back should it go? To the beginning of me? Centuries? Millennia? How do you define the start of your being when in some ways you have always been? Time is difficult to form. Michael Shelley, though, he is easier to keep track of. He was born. He was pointless. And he should have died. But before that could happen, he went to work for the Magnus Institute—that ivory tower, keeping its prisoners ignorant in pursuit of . . . knowledge. (Laughs) A dungeon full of idiot watchers. And Michael Shelley was no exception.
>
> —MAG 101: "Another Twist"



MAGNUS INSTITUTE
Witness Statement

Witness Name:
Statement Date:
Incident Date:
Incident Location:
Other Witnesses:

Statement

(Use additional pages provided if needed.)

FOR INSTITUTE USE ONLY

Statement Number:
Date Recorded:
Related Files:

Investigator Notes
Investigator Name:
Investigation Date:
Corroborations:
Witnesses Contacted:
Incident Updates:

TM and © 2024 Rusty Quill Ltd.

If you've played a tabletop roleplaying game before, you can of course play The Magnus Archives RPG in the way that you're accustomed. That is to say, the GM gives the players a hook into the adventure so they can become a part of the action (and, in the case of The Magnus Archives, the horror).

However, *The Magnus Archives* podcast suggests a new opportunity as well. Just as nearly every episode begins with the recording of a written statement in which someone relates the details of a potentially paranormal experience they had, your own stories in the game can begin with a statement as well.

Again, this could be handled in the way of a conventional tabletop RPG, where the GM summarizes or reads aloud the text of a statement that begins the investigation for the PCs. The GM could even use the statement of an episode of the podcast or write up a statement and hand it out to the players, or perhaps go so far as to record the statement on their phone or other device.

But, as integral as the statements are to the podcast, perhaps some people would find it appropriate to have the group work together to create the statement. This is, after all, an exercise in group storytelling.

THE STATEMENT PROCESS

This is the beginning of a group process in which everyone works together to create a statement that will lead to an investigation for the PCs. The statement doesn't involve the PCs—it's something that happened to someone else, and the PCs use it as their primary bit of evidence to investigate the phenomenon it describes.

STATEMENT BEGINS

One player needs to be the statement author. (We use the term "author" because the statements most often begin in written form, even if they are later recorded as audio.) Very likely, in a campaign, there will be many statements, so everyone will get a turn as the statement author. Perhaps multiple turns.

The player creates a name and a background for this character. Don't worry about game stats or a character sentence. Just "Neal Philips, tax preparer at Mudder & Company." Give them a bit of a personality that will come out in the first sentence or two of the statement. "I'm not very good at my job. But really, it's my boss's fault." It's okay if you don't know where the statement (the story) is going. The next person will take it from there. These first few sentences should focus on establishing the character. They also can, but don't have to, spark the story itself. The example given only establishes a bit about the character. You could also start with something like "I love my wife. Even after she tried to kill me, I still loved her." That's intriguing, but we'll use the first one for our ongoing example here.

THE SETUP

Next, a different player takes the proverbial reins and builds on whatever the statement author said by adding a few sentences about the background of the story. This should incorporate the character as established, and it shouldn't countermand or change what's been said before. Rather than tell the whole story, it should provide a foundation for others to build on. It can begin the basic idea, such as "Neal was told by his boss to meet with a weird lady who runs a chiropractic clinic where they're doing weird stuff, and Neal has to do her taxes."

The player could also try to do this in character. For example, "The old man always gives me all the terrible clients. The weirdos. And so one day, about a year ago, I'm assigned to meet with a new client. She runs a chiropractic clinic, which is fine enough. I think they're probably quacks, but that's just me. She wants to meet at her office, so I travel across town and end up at her clinic. But there was something really weird…"

FLESHING THINGS OUT

This is when a third player jumps in. They take what's been said before and build on it, fleshing it out with new details. Again, this can be the summary of an idea, like "Her office is full of weird art—like diagrams of human anatomy but it's all twisted and wrong." Or it can be a continuation of the actual statement: "…about the art in her office. It was made up of diagrams of skeletons, bone structure, and that kind of thing. Which isn't inappropriate for a clinic, except even I know enough about basic human anatomy to know that this stuff was all wrong. I mean, maybe it was all from the olden days, when they knew less, but I don't think doctors of any kind ever thought some people have three arms."

THE GM INTERJECTS

At this point, let's give the GM the chance to pop in with a few thoughts. First of all, this tax client is clearly going to be a major NPC, so she needs a name, and the GM suggests one: Dr. Maria Tomlinson. The GM might give a few details about her appearance or manner. They're the one who'll be portraying her, after all.

Unlike the other players, the GM *can* make minor changes to what's come before. This is because the GM has to turn the statement into the springboard for an investigation for the PCs and might need different things to work with. This should never change the essence of the statement or erase something that one of the players really likes. For example, the GM might say, "In addition to the weird art, Maria's office has taxidermized animals as decor, but they don't look quite right. The limbs are bent, or the heads are too large." Thinking ahead, the GM is already planning a possible encounter where these taxidermized beasts—and some from the back room that are even more twisted—animate and try to attack the PCs.

Most likely, the GM doesn't add to the statement itself. They just insert or massage details for the players to use and build on.

THE STATEMENT AUTHOR REACTS

Next, we return to the statement author. They are sort of the only "player character" involved in this process, so we need to know what they do or how they react.

In this case, it might just be something like "I did my best to ignore the diagrams and the animals and got to business. After engaging Dr. Tomlinson in a bit of small talk, I started asking her the standard tax preparer questions." In other statements, however, the statement author might try to flee a scary scene or, due to their curiosity, slip in where they're not supposed to go when no one is looking.

It's not a bad idea to establish what the character is thinking about whatever they are experiencing, and this is an opportunity to further expand on their personality if it's interesting and relevant. "I just wanted to get the bare minimum of what I needed and get out of that place. I thought maybe I could stop at a bar on the way back to my own office for a drink. Or two."

Obviously, this process creates a statement given by a normal person who probably started out not believing or knowing much about the paranormal. In the podcast, there are many statements provided by people involved in the deeper story, who might even be an Avatar of one of the Entities. We'll think of those as exceptions for our purposes.

Remember that some statements are accounts from far in the past, either given a long time ago, or simply in the form of old letters or journal entries. If you do this with your statement, you need to decide this before you begin.

THE TWIST

Once the background has been set up and fleshed out, and we know what the statement author is doing and thinking, it's time to get to the heart of the story. And because this is a horror story, the "heart" is usually expressed as a twist in expectations. The point isn't necessarily to surprise anyone (everyone involved *knows* this is a horror tale) but rather to show where things deviate from reality. This is what makes turning to the Magnus Institute the only recourse the character has, because surely neither the police nor anyone else will believe their story.

In fact, this is the part of the statement where our narrator usually says something like "I know you're probably not going to believe this, but…"

This is when a player—either one of the two from The Setup or Fleshing Things Out, or yet another player—interjects with what we'll call the *awful idea*. Something horrific and paranormal occurs. The statement author experiences something that should be impossible, and it's terrifying to them. This moment should be rich in descriptive detail. For example, the player might state, "I know your institute deals in all manner of strange things—ghosts and weird whatever—but this isn't some silly spook story. It was real. See, I was in her office getting the details I needed from her, filling out all the right forms and checking the right boxes on those forms, when . . . I don't even know how to make sense of it. I mean, one minute I was asking for her expensed receipts and the next I'm on a table. I'm lying face down on a table. In a completely different room. Did she drug me? I might normally think that would explain a blackout, but it doesn't explain what happened next. Dr. Tomlinson was standing over me with her hands on my back, as if she's doing chiropractic whatever on me. Before I could say anything, though, her hands were moving across my back. Or rather, parts of my back were moving as she pushed on them. Parts of your back that aren't supposed to move like that! I heard cracking and crunching noises that sounded like bones snapping. And, if I really need to say it, it hurt like hell! The pain was sharp and forceful, like her hands were some kind of power tools. She was doing things to me that shouldn't be possible."

Of course, as before, there's no reason it has to be so verbose. The player can simply interject the awful idea plainly if they're not up for adding to the monologue. "Neal suddenly finds himself on the chiropractic table and she's working on him, but it's making impossible changes to his body."

THE STATEMENT AUTHOR GETS OUT

At this point, we go back to the original player and let them decide how the character got from the awful idea to a position where they could give the statement. As before, this builds on what's already been said. It doesn't countermand anything. But the player (and the character) has complete agency to determine what happens, and what succeeds or fails. There's no dice rolling in this process. The statement is a story from the past, and dice in the game are used to help determine the present and the future.

However, the issue or problem that has arisen is in no way resolved. This is the place where your statements in the game may not match the way statements are sometimes presented in the podcast. The statement author gets away (because how else could they give the statement?) but they don't defeat the monster or villain, and they don't solve any mysteries.

Not every statement will involve the author running away. Sometimes they'll make a decision that allows them to avoid the impending danger, or they'll just have an awful realization. In rare cases, the author may not survive, and their statement is released by their estate, trust, or something else. Keep to the context of the story being told.

So our statement author comes up with something like "Somehow, I managed to push myself off the table, rolling onto the floor with a thud. I tried to get up, still with snapping and crunching sounds coming from inside me. I was unable to fully straighten my back. The pain was bad, but my terror was worse. I scrambled to my feet and tore out of there."

If you want, you can throw in another "I swear to you this truly happened. You have to believe me."

FINAL GM NOTES

The GM now has one last chance to insert things that can come back to be part of the investigation that the PCs will undertake. This is a great time to presage little tidbits or set up details that will become important later. It's also a good time to insert information that will make the investigation work. For example, if the statement has the main location burning to the ground at the end, the GM can say, "But when they look back, the building still stands, as if there had never been a fire."

For our ongoing sample statement, the GM might add: "As Neal runs out of the clinic, Dr. Tomlinson cries, 'Come back, Mr. Philips, I'm not finished!' She sounds horribly disappointed, like an artist unable to finish her art."

Or perhaps: "As Neal flees, he catches a brief glimpse of a hulking figure he hadn't seen before coming out of a room behind the office."

DENOUEMENT

The denouement is how everything wraps up and how the statement author gets to the point where they're making the statement. At this stage of the process, everyone at the table can contribute if they wish to. This is the last chance to alter the statement and set up the investigation to come, so if there are needed facts or ideas too amazing to leave out, the players should propose them. The group as a whole must agree to incorporate them, but it behooves everyone to be open to all ideas and discard only those that truly don't fit or that contradict what's already established. This isn't the time to say, "Oh, maybe instead of a tax preparer, Neal is an astronaut on a space station…"

To finish our example, the group might end with this: "I went straight for my apartment, locked the door, and passed out on the floor. I woke up hours later. I felt better, and I could even straighten my back. But I just wasn't feeling . . . right. Not pain, exactly. I just wasn't comfortable in my own body. And my back was making weird crunching noises whenever I moved. I went to an urgent care place nearby—not that Mudder & Company has much health care coverage, but it's all I had. Anyway, they sent me to the ER to get X-rays, and the doctors there said one of my scapula was wildly out of place, and much smaller than it should be. They said that some of my vertebrae were missing, and were surprised that I could stand or move at all. But mostly, they said that I must have been born with these abnormalities. When I assured them I hadn't, they asked if I'd been in a serious car accident when I was a child. I told them no, but I don't know if they believed any of this. They certainly didn't seem to believe that a chiropractor could have done this to me.

"I went to the police, but they didn't believe me either. They said a bad chiropractor appointment wasn't a crime. I went to a lawyer, but she said that based on what the ER doctors said, I didn't have a case."

The denouement needs to end with the statement author coming to the Institute to give their statement or a witness giving it on their behalf. It should explain why they didn't go to more traditional authorities or, if they did, why that didn't amount to much, if anything.

Don't worry if you don't have the real-world knowledge to determine how the police would react or how things might realistically turn out at the end of the scary story. As long as everyone in the group is on board, it's fine. And if someone has difficulty suspending their disbelief, it's their responsibility to suggest changes or tweaks to the final story so that it all works in their mind. That is, in fact, one of the great things about having everyone contribute—not only is everyone invested, but everyone should find the story both believable and compelling.

Throughout this process, the players can take notes of the details. If desired, once the statement is complete, you could have the statement author record it, just like it was from the podcast. (It might not be as long or as eloquent, but that's fine.)

POST-STATEMENT

The only thing that's left is the bit that comes after the statement, as heard in the podcast. In most episodes, this is the archivist talking about the context of the statement or other relevant facts.

This part of the process is entirely the GM's purview. It's the bridge that leads to the PCs investigating the situation described in the statement. Mostly, it might cover what else is in the case file associated with the statement. For example, it might have Neal's X-rays and the medical report from the urgent care facility.

Sometimes, it might have information about what happened after the end of the statement—such as "Mr. Philips was reported missing three weeks after giving this statement"—but for the most part, that's the kind of detail the PCs should learn when they investigate, not now.

Another way of looking at it is this: If there was a podcast that related the investigations of the PCs in your campaign, when the statement ends and the archivist talks about how they and the people who work with them followed up on the details therein, what they're describing is what happened to the PCs. In other words, the meat of the "adventure" is what happened between when the statement was given and when the statement is recorded and (presumably) filed away.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The statement process as delineated here is based loosely on a storytelling game where everyone adds one sentence at a time. It's also got roots in the Surrealistic game called exquisite corpse. And of course, it's tied closely to the fundamentals of improv acting, with a heavy emphasis on "Yes, and…" The purpose is to allow everyone in the group who wishes it to be a part of the process, while still having some order. As previously mentioned, the end result is hopefully one that everyone involved finds compelling, entertaining, believable, and—best of all—a bit scary.

You can vary the process to avoid the statements becoming too formulaic. Perhaps there's a different flow of events, with multiple encounters with the awful idea, or maybe there's an awful idea and a *more* awful idea. Perhaps the statement is actually a note hastily penned before the character died or disappeared. Maybe the statement is a follow-up on an investigation that the PCs conducted earlier in the campaign, one they thought had been resolved. If these variations are used, the GM should probably be the impetus for doing so.

You'll notice that in the examples, at no point does anyone say anything like "Let's make this one about The Flesh," because the statement author presumably doesn't know anything about the Entities. Plus, starting with one of the Entities often leads to disagreements about what is and isn't endemic to it and puts perhaps unwanted limitations on the story. The point here is to create a harrowing, creepy, or disturbing story. Let the GM worry about how it fits into the larger setting.

Similarly, in the examples no one tosses out information or ideas about things that the statement author couldn't know, such as, "And the chiropractor secretly belongs to a cult, and they worship at an altar made of twisted corpses." That might turn out to be the case, but the statement author doesn't see or experience that (at least, not in the time frame before making the statement). Try to keep the statement, and even discussions about the statement, limited only to the experiences of the statement author.

SUMMARY

You can use this short summary of each step as you make your way through the process.

Statement Begins: We get the name and a basic suggestion of the statement author's personality, occupation, or both. This comes from the first player, also called the statement author.

The Setup: The statement author is brought into the circumstances of the statement. This comes from the second player.

Fleshing Things Out: We learn more details about the situation from the third player.

The GM Interjects: The GM makes necessary adjustments or additions that the group will use as the statement continues.

The Statement Author Reacts: The first player provides some actions that the author takes and what they are thinking and feeling about the situation.

The Twist: The awful idea emerges, making it clear to the statement author that the situation involves the paranormal and things are Bad with a capital B. This comes from a fourth player (or perhaps from the second or third player).

The Statement Author Gets Out: The first player describes how the author of the statement gets away or otherwise survives the horror—at least long enough to make the statement.

Final GM Notes: The GM adds in any last details to set up the investigation.

Denouement: The whole group works together to describe what happens between the horror of the twist and how the character got to the Magnus Institute to give their statement, including what they did before going to the Institute, if anything.

Post-Statement: The GM provides any information the Institute has about the situation other than the statement. This probably shouldn't be much, because most of the information will come as the PCs investigate.

The purpose of the statement is to set the stage for the investigation the PCs will undertake. It raises questions—it doesn't answer them.

FROM STATEMENT TO ADVENTURE

Although this is discussed further in chapter 14, let's look at what the GM will do after this specific example statement is created.

NPCs

As the PCs follow up on this statement, they will almost certainly first meet with the statement author, Neal Philips. They'll want to find out how he's doing, check the veracity of the details of the statement, and learn what (if anything) has happened since. They'll also want to talk to Maria Tomlinson, inquire about her practice, and ascertain for themselves if she's really some sort of supernatural experimental "doctor" who preys on unwilling subjects.

This means the GM needs to have these NPCs at the ready:

Neal Philips: This is easy, as he's just a normal tax preparer, and all the pertinent details are already laid out by the statement. The GM could add a twist and give Neal a surprise connection to something supernatural or shady. Overall, though, it's not a good idea to make the whole statement a lie. Or there could be some strange aftereffects from the modifications in his body—perhaps he continues to change, or maybe he's not even in full control anymore. But most likely, he's just a guy who was in the wrong place at the wrong time and now is lucky to be alive.

Maria Tomlinson: Most likely the main antagonist in this situation, Maria has some kind of paranormal abilities over flesh. Maybe she's got cursed gloves or a dangerous book, or maybe she's an Avatar of The Flesh and her powers are innate. She's also sneaky, devious, and more than likely violent.

Fortunately, creating NPCs is quick and easy. The GM decides to go with these stats:

- Neal is a level 2 NPC, with the changes in his body hindering all his physical actions.
- Maria is level 4, but level 5 for stealth. She can rearrange and modify people's bones with her touch, which can mean a serious injury or an attack that gives 2 points of Stress and hinders all physical actions until the victim gets professional medical help.

LOCATIONS

The GM should be ready to describe at least two locations:

Neal's Apartment: Probably just a normal place. No real preparation needed. The GM can briefly describe an apartment they've seen in real life or a movie.

The Tomlinson Chiropractic Clinic: The GM can describe a typical office with a waiting room, a couple of rooms for adjustments, Maria's office, and a back room. A thirty-second internet search turns up a few chiropractic office floor plans that would work just fine. Either way, it's the taxidermized animals in the waiting room that come to life and attack at Maria's command that are of the most interest. And perhaps kept in the back is a twisted monstrosity she created that's too horrific to display.

The PCs might visit during office hours to speak with Maria, or they might try to sneak in after hours to see what they can learn. Or they might do both.

Again, the taxidermized creatures can easily just be given a level, probably level 2 or 3. Their threat comes from their numbers—the GM notes that there are six of them—and the shock of first seeing them animate (probably 2 points of Stress). The GM decides there is a humanoid monstrosity in the back and determines it's level 5 and inflicts serious injuries. A pretty big threat to beginning players.

SURPRISES

Aside from the fact that the taxidermized animals come to life, the GM wants more surprises. Surprises, in this sense, are things that weren't in the statement but are uncovered by the PCs in their investigation. The GM decides that Maria's office has clues in the form of a few letters that suggest she is a part of a larger cult-like group of medical professionals that revere something called The Flesh and are preparing for a ritual called the Last Feast. Details include the name of a dentist in the same city that watches over something called The Shrine of Teeth. The GM can come up with the details of that horror later, if the PCs decide to look into that in a later session.

Lastly, the GM thinks about possible outcomes of the PCs' actions. For example, at some point they might call the police. If they do, Maria or the cult do a frustratingly thorough job of covering up the whole thing, sneaking away with or destroying any evidence that could be found.

CHAPTER 10

THE ENTITIES

> “Imagine you are an ant, and you have never before seen a human. Then one day, into your colony, a huge fingernail is thrust, scraping and digging. You flee to another entrance, only to be confronted by a staring eye gazing at you. You climb to the top, trying to find escape, and above, you can see the vast, dark shadow of a boot falling upon you. Would that ant be able to construct these things into the form of a single human being? Or would it believe itself to be under attack by three different, equally terrible, but very distinct assailants?”
>
> —Jurgen Leitner,
> MAG 80: “The Librarian”

FOREVER
BELOW

The Entities, also called the Fears, the Powers, the Dread Powers, and the Things That We Fear, exist in our universe, spreading terror and thriving on emotional distress.

These abstract beings of cosmic horror are believed to be responsible for supernatural phenomena and use these to evoke fear from victims and thereby sustain themselves. These Entities do not simply feed off fear but are human and animal fears made manifest. The more fearful something is, the greater the associated Entity’s power.

It is worth briefly delving deeper into their nature to encourage understanding. Although some deluded individuals worship the Entities as gods, they are not gods. With the exception of The Web and The End, they are, in fact, relatively mindless. More like forces of nature than deities. They are not powerful beings who delight in fear—they *are* fear.

The Entities do not have physical forms, nor do they exist in time as we understand it. Rather than thinking of them in some far-removed realm of their own, it’s probably more accurate to say that they’re right here, with you and me. If one were to ask “Where?” the proper response would be to ask “Where is fear?” Or for that matter “Where is anger? Or love?” Concepts don’t have bodies or locations. You can’t speak with them, and they don’t speak to you.

THE ENTITIES/FEARS OF THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES

The Buried

The Corruption

The End

The Eye

The Dark

The Slaughter

The Hunt

The Flesh

The Lonely

The Desolation

The Spiral

The Stranger

The Vast

The Web

The Extinction

Of course, as the Entities are beyond human understanding, some or all of this might be incorrect or—perhaps more likely—not entirely applicable or consistent. It's possible that when dealing with them, it's better to try to think in terms of dream logic rather than relying on rational wisdom.

The very nature of the Entities means that their power to directly affect reality as a whole is limited. However, the omnipresent threat of these beings is that they will find a way to more fully manifest in the world. If an Entity should manifest, its power over matter, energy, and existence itself would be catastrophic—a never-ending nightmare. Hell on earth.

Spoilers! In season 5 of The Magnus Archives *podcast, the Fears all manifest in the world, and it is truly horrific on a global scale.*

The architect Robert Smirke once categorized the Entities into fourteen identities to help explain their nature, with each category of fear being a distinct Entity. In truth, this distinction is largely abstract, as they are more of a spectrum. That is to say, it's not truly meaningful to create borders between the different Entities, such as trying to draw a line between The Slaughter and The Flesh. It is much more useful to realize that the point where one ends and the other begins is nearly impossible to distinguish, at least for humans. Thinking of the Entities as colors in the spectrum, where one bleeds into another, is useful, and it also helps explain why some Entities oppose one another, because their colors don't bleed together at any point—one might even say that their colors clash.

One of the factors that keeps any particular Entity's ritual from being completed is, ironically, interference by the forces of one or more of the other Entities. Each group wants to be the one with a manifested Entity, and the assumption is that if one achieves this goal, the rest cannot.

The Web and The End specifically are at least sentient enough to make long-term plans to escape this universe and to destroy reality, respectively.

> “Like colours, but if colours hated me.”
>
> —Jonathan Sims, head archivist of the Magnus Institute, London, MAG 111: “Family Business”

RITUALS

On some level, each Entity “wants” to fully manifest in our reality. Each has a unique, symbolic ritual act that, if performed, should allow them to fully manifest in the world and thus take control of it. Obviously, as non-physical beings, the Entities cannot perform the rites themselves—they have followers, servants, creations, worshippers, and Avatars to do it for them.

The rituals are, thankfully, complex and difficult, with very specific conditions, requirements, and materials needed to perform them. Most involve a particularly powerful and confident Avatar, one or more artefacts, and rare materials. They also usually require the participation of many different people, most of whom focus on spreading an appropriate kind of fear (burning people for The Desolation's ritual, forcing people into utter isolation for The Lonely, and so on). Each Entity's ritual is described in the following sections, but GMs should keep in mind that the details are sketchy and vague, and what's more, there might be multiple versions of each.

Performing a ritual should be arduous and difficult. Tailoring them to the stories being told in your campaign, with requirements as you see fit, is entirely fitting.

ALL ARE ONE

The Entities were once a single Entity, existing as an animal fear—the fear of being killed and eaten, more or less. Not until humanity emerged, with its more developed consciousness and intelligence, did the single fear become far more nuanced. As humans evolved and developed language and complex thoughts, those words and thoughts began to rend the single Entity into smaller and more specific fears. This means that as human development and culture creates new fears, it splits off additional Entities (or, if you would rather, aspects of the single Entity).

In the podcast, a man named Adelard Dekker hypothesized that a new Entity was emerging as humanity continued to develop, but it was not as strong or well-defined as Smirke's fourteen. (This Entity, The Extinction, grows out of the fear that humans now have the capability, intentionally or accidentally, to end all life, so it hasn't been around for very long. It may develop more eventually.)

It turns out, in the world of *The Magnus Archives* podcast, none of the rituals will work. Only if all the Entities manifest in the world together and at once can their manifestation ever come to pass (as it does in season 5). GMs can modify this in their game, justifying that as the Entities moved from their original universe, the "rules" governing them changed, as demonstrated in the companion podcast *The Magnus Protocol*.

AVATARS

Each Entity has sentient servants known as Avatars. The exact relationship between the Entity and its Avatar(s) lies perhaps outside human understanding. Not even the Avatars themselves understand it fully. Clearly, though, there is some form of connection—a conduit, perhaps, through which the Entity grants supernatural power. Some Avatars are (or rather, were) humans, but others are purely supernatural beings emerging from the Entity's power. In the podcast, human Avatars include Annabelle Cane, Jane Prentiss, and of course Jonathan Sims, while nonhuman Avatars are things like The Anglerfish, The Man Who Wasn't There, and even . . . Monster Pig.

Avatars work to spread the fear they represent in order to make their Entity stronger. If they do not, the Entity draws energy from the Avatar itself through the same conduit used to channel their paranormal abilities.

Becoming an Avatar, page 89

THE ENTITIES IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

Because you will set your stories in a universe that's different from the one described in the podcast, you can take whatever liberties you want with the Entities. You can merge one or more, add one of your own design, or ignore the ones you don't like. Perhaps even more important, if one of the Fears is particularly troubling for you or a player—such as with The Buried and someone who is seriously claustrophobic—you can just eject it from your game.

THE INDIVIDUAL ENTITIES

Each Entity description is just one example of what that Entity could be like. As indicated under The Entities in Your Campaign, The Buried described here might be different in another game (or, if you like, another timeline).

The following are the fourteen (actually fifteen) Entities of fear.

THE BURIED

The fear The Buried brings involves being crushed under the weight of something else such as dirt, water, rock, or even money. It is the opposite of—and antithetical to—The Vast, while it seems somewhat related to The Lonely.

Aliases: The Centre, Choke, Too Close I Cannot Breathe, Forever Deep Below Creation.

Fears: Claustrophobia, suffocating, drowning, being buried alive, everything crashing down, being trapped.

Manifestations: Caves, dirt, financial issues, heavy rain, underground transport, tight spaces.

Artefacts: Coffin of The Buried, entombing crate, *DIG, The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

Avatars (from podcast): "The Governor," Enrique MacMillan, Hezekiah Wakely.

Monsters and NPCs: Buried thing.

Ritual: The Sunken Sky involves the creation of a wide pit in a prominent location, then throwing people (often people throwing themselves) into it. With each new life consumed, the pit grows wider and more powerful. Should the ritual be stopped before completion, the surrounding area is destroyed in an earthquake.

THE CORRUPTION

The Corruption is everything that disgusts, contaminates, or infects. Those drawn to it find love or comfort from mold, bugs, or disease, as strange as that may be. While The Corruption has some intersection with The Buried (as things underground are often disgusting, like bugs or worms), it is at odds with The Eye and The Spiral, and it may be easily manipulated by The Web.

Aliases: Filth, The Crawling Rot, Flesh Hive.

Fears: Corruption, disease, filth, disgust, revulsion.

Manifestations: Mold, bugs, rot, decay, infection, crawling skin, toxic love.

Artefacts: *A Journal of the Plague Year, The Tale of a Field Hospital*, pestilent scalpel, syringe of Dr. Snow.

Avatars (from podcast): Jane Prentiss, John Amherst, Timothy Hodge, Jordan Kennedy.

Monsters and NPCs: The Flesh Hive, The Plaguebearer, silver worm.

Ritual: The Doorway Into Corruption may not be a formal ritual, but rather the process of metaphysically worming in between the barriers that keep The Corruption from manifesting already. Or it might involve the creation of a literal doorway made by worms or other creatures related to the Entity. The side effect of this process may result in the widespread corruption of the surrounding area.

THE DARK

The primal fear of the dark is a powerful, often irrational one. As such, it may be one of the oldest Entities. Many people worship The Dark, such as the People's Church of the Divine Host. This secretive cult has infiltrated corporations and even governments. Like the Entity it serves, the cult may be surprisingly ancient.

The Dark is no ally of The Eye, but it has shared qualities and goals with The Lonely and The Vast.

Aliases: Mr. Pitch, The Forever Blind, The Sightless Hidden.

Fears: Darkness, what lies beyond, hiding creatures.

Manifestations: Creatures hidden in the dark, shadow figures and monsters, blindness, coldness, dark water.

Artefacts: Dark star, dark wardrobe.

Avatars (from podcast): The People's Church of the Divine Host (Manuela Dominguez, Maxwell Rayner, Robert Montauk, Vardaan Darvish, Natalie Ennis), Callum Brodie.

Monsters and NPCs: Lightless beast, The Sandman, The Taker of Light, cultist of the Divine Host.

Ritual: The Extinguished Sun must be performed during a solar eclipse in a spot important to the Entity. Important areas are often where at certain times of year the darkness is complete around the clock, such as far to the north or the south. It involves the creature of the dark star, a ball of pure darkness, as well as numerous blood sacrifices. Eventually, if the ritual is completed, the dark star replaces the sun and the world is cast into eternal darkness.

THE DESOLATION

The Desolation is more than simply destruction; it is unthinking or cruel destruction. It is the death of potential and the ender of value. The Cult of the Lightless Flame worships The Desolation, and its members revel in destroying the lives of people who have things to live for. It goes back at least to the 1950s but keeps a low profile.

The Desolation has an antagonistic relationship with The Web but may work in conjunction with The Stranger.

Aliases: The Lightless Flame, The Torturing Flame, The Devastation, The Blackened Earth, The Ravening Burn, Asag.

Fears: Pain, loss, burning, senseless destruction.

Manifestations: Fire, wax, heat, burns, destruction of potential.

Artefacts: "Small book bound in red" (*Roaring Desolation*).

Avatars (from podcast): The Cult of the Lightless Flame (Agnes Montague, Arthur Nolan, Diego Molina, Eileen Montague, Eugene Vanderstock, Jude Perry).

Monsters and NPCs: The Chosen of Flame, cultist of the Lightless Flame.

Ritual: The Scoured Earth involves a central Avatar, The Chosen of Flame. As the name suggests, if this Avatar gathers enough personal power, they literally burn the world. Putting an end to the Avatar puts an end to the ritual, and The Chosen of Flame must be nurtured as such from birth, so the process will take decades to start anew.

The People's Church of the Divine Host is a secretive cult with ancient origins. Its members worship The Dark. For as long as most people have feared The Dark, a few have revered it. Cultists have infiltrated corporations and even governments, but most people are unaware of the church's true nature, believing it to be a small, alternative religion.

The Cult of the Lightless Flame are deluded or insane people who actually worship The Desolation. Most people don't know it exists, and even those that do dismiss it as "just another strange cult."

The Chosen of Flame, page 205

THE END

One of the oldest of the Entities, The End represents the inevitable ending of all things. It is likely to be the last Entity to remain when all others are gone, but presumably even Death will die. Although there may be some connection between The End and The Slaughter, in truth, The End needs no connection, no worshippers, and no rituals. It can passively wait, as it knows it will be triumphant (and as such, may be more conscious than the other Entities, not including The Web).

Aliases: Death, Terminus/The Termination of All Life, The Coming End That Waits for All and Cannot Be Ignored.

Fears: Death, inevitability, entropy.

Manifestations: Bones, the dead (skeletons, mummies, zombies, etc.), dreams.

Artefacts: *Book of the Dead, Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*, Death's game pieces.

Avatars (from podcast): Justin Gough, Nathaniel Thorp, Oliver Banks, Tova McHugh.

Monsters and NPCs: Death.

Ritual: None. It just has to wait.

THE EYE

The Eye represents the fear of being watched, of secrets exposed. It is behind the existence and operation of the Magnus Institute, and its Avatars operate through that organization to monitor the influence of the other Entities. Other than perhaps The Lonely, The Eye and its forces can be considered the enemies of all the other Entities. From time to time, the Avatars of The Eye take overt and drastic steps to foil the plots of the others.

Aliases: Beholding, The Ceaseless Watcher, It Knows You, The Great Eye that watches all who linger in terror and gorges itself on the sufferings of those under its unrelenting stuporous gaze.

Fears: Being watched, being exposed, being followed, secrets revealed, curiosity.

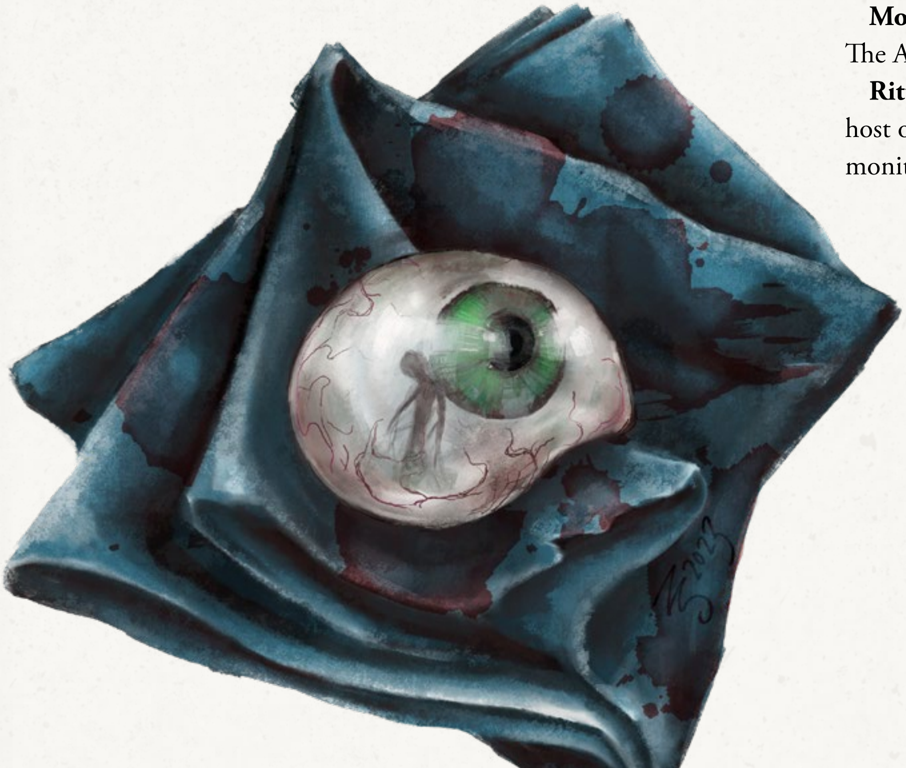
Manifestations: Eyes, security cameras, watching figures, libraries, books.

Artefacts: Mirror of beholding, security camera instruction manual, rock eye, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, *Dictionnaire Infernal*, *Seen.*

Avatars (from podcast): Jonathan Sims, Jonah Magnus (Richard Mendelson, James Wright, Elias Bouchard).

Monsters and NPCs: The Abiding Watcher, The Archivist, mirror haunt, watcher's husk.

Ritual: The Watcher's Crown requires a host of captive people, their actions constantly monitored over a long period of time.



THE FLESH

The Flesh is perhaps one of the newer Entities, with some suggesting it is related to the rise of corporate agriculture, the inhumane treatment of animals, and the mass processing of their meat. It is body horror and gore, but also the dread that our physical bodies are all we are. And of course, it has strong ties to cannibalism.

The Flesh may work in conjunction with The Spiral, The Web, and The Stranger. It is violently antagonistic toward The Eye.

Aliases: Viscera, Meat-is-Meat.

Fears: Industrialized agriculture, butchery, body horror, existential dread.

Manifestations: Meat, corpses, blood, bones, butchers, meat industry, strange bodies.

Artefacts: *The Boneturner's Tale*, flesh grinder, *The Stalwart Hunters' Almanac*.

Avatars (from podcast): Angela, Eustace Wick, John Haan, Toby Carlisle, Tom Haan, Jared Hopworth.

Monsters and NPCs: The Boneturner, The Jigsaw Lady, Monster Pig, possessed cannibal.

Ritual: The Last Feast, like the Sunken Sky, requires the creation of a deep pit. In this case, the pit is filled with meat. The more meat that is dumped into the pit, the larger the pit becomes. Eventually, the participants must hurl themselves into the pit at a key moment, becoming the meat that pushes the ritual to completion. But it takes a lot of meat. Destroying the pit (such as with the use of dynamite) ruins the ritual.

THE HUNT

Another of the oldest Entities, The Hunt presides over not just human fears but also—and perhaps more so—those of animals (particularly prey animals). The Hunt has little relationship to the other Entities, despite minor thematic crossovers with The Slaughter and The Flesh.

Aliases: Butgeruch, Run.

Fears: Being chased/hunted, being prey, losing control, obsession.

Manifestations: Predators, predatory monsters, animal instincts, physical animal traits and abilities, obsessive behavior.

Artefacts: *The Stalwart Hunters' Almanac*.

Avatars (from podcast): Alice "Daisy" Tonner, Julia Montauk, Robert Montauk, Trevor Herbert.

Monsters and NPCs: Grinning wheel, The Hunter, vampire, The Vampire Hunter.

Ritual: The Everchase is a strange ritual because it has no end. It involves an endless hunt, the participants hunting every living thing on Earth. It cannot be completed, as The Hunt is more interested in the pursuit than in fruition.

The Flesh sometimes draws on Christian imagery to frighten, with a twist on the rite of communion or the imagery of suffering on the cross.

The Slaughter has a strange connection with music, particularly battlefield music. Its Avatars and their powers are often music-related.

THE LONELY

Isolation and disconnection can occur even in—perhaps particularly in—a world crowded with people. We are often most fearful when we are alone, so The Lonely is related to most of the other Entities who often draw upon victims while alone.

Aliases: Forsaken, The One Alone, Listen-There-Is-Nothing.

Fears: Isolation, rejection, disconnection, being lost, ego death, memory loss, sadness.

Manifestations: Fog, large rooms, silence, suburbs, empty rooms, crowds of faceless people.

Artefacts: *A Disappearance*, boatswain's call, lonely painting.

Avatars (from podcast): The Lukas Family (Peter Lukas, Mordechai Lukas, Conrad Lukas), Martin Blackwood.

Monsters and NPCs: The Friendless, lonesome crowd.

Ritual: The Silence is a ritual created relatively recently by an Avatar (The Friendless). Essentially, hundreds of people must be isolated, sealed away, and left to die, alone. If the ritual is stopped, it can only be attempted every few decades, as The Lonely moves quite slowly.

The Friendless, page 219

THE SLAUGHTER

Pure violence, often on a massive scale, The Slaughter is the fear of pain and death that could come at any moment during war. The Slaughter has been known to oppose the machinations of The Stranger.

Aliases: Carnage, Rolling Murder, The-World-is-Naught-but-Rage.

Fears: Pain, unpredictability, unmotivated violence, killing, war.

Manifestations: People driven "mad with Slaughter," soldiers, music, war, murder, military.

Artefacts: Blood money pouch, slaughter gun, slaughter knife, *Killer's Song*.

Avatars (from podcast): Alfred Grifter, Amritsar ghosts, Melanie King, The Deserter, The Piper.

Monsters and NPCs: The Piper.

Ritual: The Risen War is a manufactured conflict carried out by hundreds of people trapped and coerced into fighting. The completion of the ritual involves destroying the site with weapons of war (or even weapons of mass destruction).

THE SPIRAL

If you can't trust your own senses, or if you feel as though your mind is playing tricks on you, you're in the clutches of The Spiral. The Spiral maintains an antagonistic relationship with The Corruption and The Stranger, and it has a complicated, uneasy (love/hate?) relationship with The Eye.

Aliases: *Es Mentiras* (It Is Lies), The Twisting Deceit, It Is Not What It Is.

Fears: Madness, the world is wrong, delusion, deception, insanity.

Manifestations: Spirals, patterns, fractals, hallucinations, illusions.

Artefacts: Camera of occultation, fractal pot, patterned rug, *The Travels, Whispers in White Matter.*

Avatars (from podcast): Gabriel, The Distortion (Michael and Helen), The Man Who Wasn't There.

Monsters and NPCs: Deceitful arc, The Distortion, The Man Who Wasn't There, possessed cannibal.

Ritual: The Great Twisting centers on The Distortion, and it must be performed in a location that does not actually exist. An uncharted island or an island on a map that isn't truly there might qualify, as would the so-called "trap streets" that exist on maps only to catch plagiarists. The ritual needs a huge altar and a thousand human sacrifices so The Distortion can create "the door that would open to all the places that were never there."

THE STRANGER

Utilizing changing identities, false identities, and the familiar made unfamiliar, The Stranger combines these with the uncanny valley and inhuman things meant to appear human to instill fear. The Stranger's strengths involve the terror that comes from deception and betrayal as well as misunderstanding. It's that nagging feeling that something's just not right.

The Desolation (and in particular the Cult of the Lightless Flame) is allied with The Stranger. Despite a close thematic connection with The Spiral—or perhaps because of it—The Stranger opposes it as well as The Eye.

Aliases: I Do Not Know You, Faceless One.

Fears: Strangers, the unknown, the uncanny, the unfamiliar, uncanny valley, suspicion.

Manifestations: "Uncanny" creatures, mannequins, wax figures, masks, taxidermy, theaters, performance.

Artefacts: Calliope, gorilla skin.

Avatars (from podcast): The Anglerfish, Breekon & Hope, Daniel Rawlings, Gregor Orsinov, Nikola Orsinov, NotThem, Sarah Baldwin, Wolfgang von Kempelen, anatomy students.

Monsters and NPCs: The Anglerfish, clown doll, The Deliverymen, The Ringmaster, skin shell, uncanny mannequin.

Ritual: The Unknowing is a ritual involving a chaotic dance of false people, such as NotThem, perfect strangers, and skin shells. The whole thing is to be performed in an old theater, and someone must be wearing the gorilla skin. The dance and the music involved completely twist the senses of anyone nearby.

The Spiral is connected to anything that fools the senses, such as optical illusions, mind-bending trickery, and stage magic.

The Stranger's activities sometimes involve circuses, funhouse mirrors, and mysterious and confusing music.

The Distortion, page 216

NotThem, page 230

Perfect stranger, page 231

Skin shell, page 238

THE VAST

Almost the opposite of The Buried, The Vast is the fear of being lost in too much space. It is the dread that comes from feeling insignificant, but it's also tied with something as mundane as the fear of heights.

The Vast's horror can also come from megalophobia, the fear of huge things.

The Vast is antithetical to The Buried, but it can be related to The Flesh, as they both encompass existential dread.

Aliases: The Falling Titan, Vertigo.

Fears: Heights, falling, open spaces, sky, space, deep water, voids, insignificance, meaninglessness, being lost.

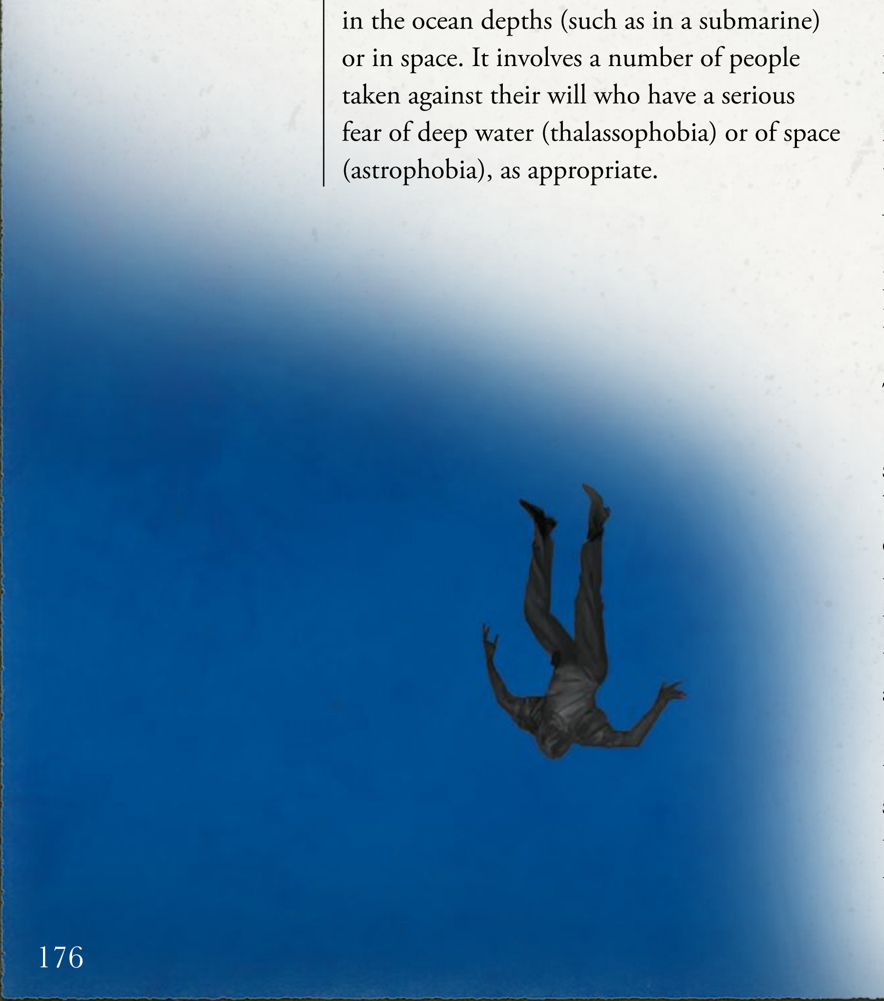
Manifestations: Voids, spaces, vertigo, falling, finite converting to infinite.

Artefacts: *Ex Altiora, Infinity Above: A Book of Astronomy.*

Avatars (from podcast): Michael "Mike" Crew, the Fairchilds (Simon Fairchild, Harriet Fairchild).

Monsters and NPCs: Disciple of the Endless, greyling.

Ritual: The Awful Deep must be performed in the ocean depths (such as in a submarine) or in space. It involves a number of people taken against their will who have a serious fear of deep water (thalassophobia) or of space (astrophobia), as appropriate.



THE WEB

Like its namesake, The Web traps people without them even knowing it, manipulating them like puppets on strings. It might be the only completely self-aware Entity, utilizing the fears it fosters (mainly the fear of being manipulated or controlled) to create a metaphysical neutral network of sorts. With this vast intelligence, The Web plans and schemes and may even directly communicate with its Avatars.

The Web manipulates the followers of all the other Entities to get what it wants, but perhaps its main antagonism is reserved for The Desolation, who destroys the meaningful connections The Web wishes to exploit. The Web's association with spiders endears it to those who follow The Corruption.

Aliases: The Spider, The Great Spider, Mother of Puppets, The Mother, The Spinner of Schemes, The Hidden Machination.

Fears: Addiction, being manipulated, mind control, determinism, coercion, spiders, webs.

Manifestations: Spiders, webs, web patterns, puppets.

Artefacts: Web lighter, web table, web tape recorder, *A Guest for Mr. Spider*, 蜘蛛が食べている (*Kumo ga tabete iru—Spiders Are Eating*), thrumming cocoon.

Avatars (from podcast): Annabelle Cane, Emma Harvey, Neil Lagorio, Raymond Fielding.

Monsters and NPCs: Bewebbed puppet, The Weaver.

Ritual: The Web's original ritual was suitably complex. It involved a mass rite that brought all the Entities into the world at once, engineered by manipulating the forces of those Entities. But the changes brought upon the world by the manifestation were also soon undone by further manipulation of people and events, opening a portal to allow The Web (and the other Entities) out of the universe of their origin and into the greater multiverse, spread by a podcast called *The Magnus Archives* that in effect infected all who listened to it and the world they called home.

With The Web's original scheme brought to fruition, it's unknown if there is a new ritual to be performed in the universe(s) it now inhabits. One can be certain that if there is, it would involve manipulating disparate forces to carry it out rather than direct action on the part of The Web's Avatars or servants.

THE EXTINCTION

The Extinction is an Entity only now in the process of becoming distinct from the others. It is the fear of the end of the world—not just our own death, but the death of our species, our planet, and all life.

Aliases: The Terrible Change, The Future Without Us, The World Is Always Ending.

Fears: Catastrophic change, environmental disaster, loss of humanity, hypocrisy, pollution, guilt.

Manifestations: Human technology, future visions, pollution, inanimate brought animate.

Artefacts: None yet, although a humanoid robot being developed by any number of billionaire-backed firms would make a good candidate.

Avatars: None yet, although pollution monsters, rogue AI, and posthumans fit thematically.

Ritual: None yet but most likely some kind of ecological collapse with themes of pollution, rampant capitalism, runaway technology and similar.

> Once upon a time there was fear. Old fear. Primal fear. A fear of blood and pounding feet, a fear of that sudden burst of pain and then nothing. And that fear was nothing. Went nowhere. Knew not what it was.
>
> Then it became. Or perhaps it always was and simply entered. But fear was here and true and was itself, and it hungered. It wished to know more. It wished to feel more. It wished to *be* more. And to those things that hurried through the grass, that shivered through the night in their burrows and their caves, because they knew the dark held flashing talons and shining eyes, they fed the fear. It was blunt and it was simple, but still it was solid enough to satisfy. And the thing that was fear was sated and content.
>
> Then came minds that knew it differently. They grew slowly, over the millennia; inch by inch they found new things to dread. The fear of their own end, of the things that lived in the darkness, became a fear of the darkness itself. And as they grew to know what it is that they saw, to give it names, and struggle at learning, so too did they learn to fear that their eyes might deceive them, or show them too much.
>
> —MAG 200: "Last Words"

CHAPTER 11

A WORLD OF FEARS

> “We kill him, and release the Fears into . . . how many other realities?”
>
> “She said thousands, but I don’t think she actually knows.”
>
> “John?”
>
> “Not something I can see, I’m afraid.”
>
> “But is it *all* other realities or just some of them?”
>
> “Does it matter?”
>
> —MAG 199:
> “Seeing It Through”

At the very end of the final episode of *The Magnus Archives* podcast, the Entities escape the universe of the show and slip into other universes (maybe all of them?), thanks to the manipulations of The Web.

If you plan to start your own campaign based on *The Magnus Archives* and you want to use the Fears (and why wouldn’t you? They’re awful!), then by definition you’re not playing a game set in precisely the same universe as the show. Because the Fears have already spread from that world. The universe you set your game in can be basically identical to it if you wish, but the Entities’ escape also enables you to make the setting your own. You can use the familiar themes, horrors, and characters, but change any of them that you want. Just think about the various science fiction stories that feature a parallel Earth, and you’ll begin to see the possibilities.

Your own bespoke setting can be exactly what you want it to be. Set primarily in London, like the podcast? Great. Set in Chicago, Toronto, Singapore, or Helsinki? Also great. Jonathan Sims is the archivist? Easily done. Someone else—even a PC? Also easy.

This chapter presents some thoughts, advice, and guidelines for creating your own Magnus Archives campaign.

THE WORLD

Unless you want to really stray from the source material, the world is essentially our actual world, with the addition of the Entities that bring supernatural terror to an otherwise mundane Earth. The main advantage of this is that the setting is, by definition, familiar to everyone around the table. There's no background lore everyone has to remember about fictional lands and cities as you might in a game focused on another genre.

That said, you can change small details if you want to make it a more enjoyable experience. In the timeline of the podcast, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic never occurred. You can make similar changes. Want to set the stories in the current day but not concern yourself with politics of the time? Ignore them or erase them. Want to create horror investigations involving a super-popular television program that doesn't actually exist? Not a problem. Do as you wish. While The Magnus Archives RPG doesn't require anyone to do any worldbuilding, you're free to do any "world modifying" that you want to create the best stories you can.

CONSIDER PLAYER INPUT

While the information in this chapter could have been sequestered in chapter 14, thus making it for GMs only, it's not. Because the players should probably not only understand the setting and the elements of the setting, but have a voice in shaping it. While the GM could just set everything in Chicago, for example, letting the players have a chance to suggest that it be set in Toronto or Berlin instead ensures that everyone around the table is playing the game they want to play.

THE INSTITUTE

As you're crafting your own setting for the Magnus Archives RPG and the stories you and your group want to tell, there are some things to consider. Even if you plan to stray from the world of the podcast, there are a few concepts you will likely want to have. First among them is the Magnus Institute itself.

The core assumption of the game is that the player characters work for an organization that takes the statements of those who have encountered the supernatural, then investigates the claims. The organization doesn't have to be precisely the one from the podcast, but taking the Magnus Institute and using it as a model is a pretty good idea, and keeps the flavor of the show. You can even call it the Magnus Institute. Your own variant can still stray significantly from what's presented in the podcast. Simply stating, "Well, in *this* Magnus Institute…" makes it clear that some things will be familiar to listeners of the podcast, but not identical to the stories, and that's okay!

If you're not going to have the Magnus Institute exist as it does in the podcast, you should seriously consider creating an analog of your own. The Institute (or something like it) provides a common touchstone. The core conceit of this game is that the PCs investigate statements, so at the very least, having an organization where people can make statements will foster that.

All that said, if you want to run a campaign where the PCs are independent investigators, work for the government, operate as journalists, or are just normal people in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can do that. But it will take a little work. Particularly if the PCs are not investigators at all, you'll probably need to change at least the names of the character types. An Investigator could be a journalist, a researcher, or a student. An Elocutionist could be a salesperson or a media personality. And so on.

See below for alternative ideas.

In the world of the podcast, the Magnus Institute has a sort of sister organization in America (Washington, DC, to be exact) called the Usher Foundation and another in China known as the Pu Songling Research Centre. You can center your stories around one of these institutes if you wish for something canonical but less explored in the podcast.

Vigilo-Opperior-Audio
1818
Magnus Institute
London

THE PHYSICAL LAYOUT

Give some thought to where the Magnus Institute or your version of it is located. Is it an old building, a small campus of buildings, or a few floors of a skyscraper? Maybe it's just the basement of a building on a college campus, or the archivist's apartment.

Your vision for the Institute dictates a lot about the structure where it's located. Obviously, the default concept—as depicted in the podcast—is a stately (if older) building with offices, a lobby where the public can come in (and give statements), storage rooms for general evidence, a locked storage room for artefacts and similar items, and a large area where the files are kept (the archives).

Your version could be more modern, with the statements and files stored electronically. It could be more casual, closer to a clubhouse than an institute. Or it could be even more byzantine and bureaucratic, like a civil service office.

The important thing is that when the PCs do their investigation work that isn't out in the field, you and the players need to have an idea of where that happens. And if and when the Institute becomes the location of intrigue, danger, or other aspects of your stories, you'll want to have established what the place is like.

The core assumption of the game is that the player characters work for an organization that takes the statements of those who have encountered the supernatural, then investigates the claims.

THE INSTITUTE'S PLACE IN YOUR STORIES

The Magnus Institute isn't just a place to launch the PCs' activities. It's a place to set adventures and stories, and it's a gathering place for NPCs who can and should become more important as the campaign goes on. A great way to throw the PCs for a loop is when the trail of an investigation leads them right back to the Institute.

A few ideas:

- The PCs look into strange occurrences at a haunted library and discover that the supernatural forces at work were summoned by a self-proclaimed sorcerer who secretly works at the Institute, using their knowledge of the occult as a cover.
- The PCs discover that an artefact sought by a ruthless occultist is actually stored in the Institute, and sooner or later the occultist will figure that out.
- An Avatar of The Stranger takes an interest in the Institute and replaces one or more of the staff with NotThem.
- As in the podcast, the Institute is actually more or less a front for one of the Entities interested in gathering information. While The Eye is the perfect choice, GMs wishing to change things up could choose The Web instead, or even The Spiral or The Dark. This is a secret from all but the highest-level employees, of course.
- Beneath or near the Institute are secret tunnels, chambers, or even caves where supernatural activities occur.
- Resentful or angry at the Institute's meddling, supernatural forces retaliate. This could be an attack on the staff, an attempt to burn down the building, a seeping mystical curse, or something even more horrific or insidious.

Technically, Jonathan is the head archivist, and everyone else on his staff—Martin, Tim, Sasha, etc.—are assistant archivists. If you wish, the PCs in your game could be called assistant archivists. Since they probably won't be doing a lot of "on-screen" archival work, though, it may be better to call them investigators or agents.

CREATING YOUR INSTITUTE AS A GROUP

Since the players will be part of whatever institute and archives you have in your game, they might like to have a hand in creating the details. Things the players could flesh out include:

- The other staff members, including their names and personalities. When these people are created, make sure that while some are helpful and friendly, others are annoying or antagonistic (just like in any workplace).
- The layout of the place. The PCs should have a working knowledge of where to find everyone's office, the various files and evidence, the bathrooms, the copy machines, the office supplies, and so on. There can still be private or secret areas they don't know about.
- The procedures used. How are statements taken? What happens to them next? At what point are they entered into the archives? The default process is as follows:
    1. Those who have strange experiences give their statement, usually in person (because they have to sign their statement).
    2. The statement is reviewed by staff.
    3. Investigators (the PCs) follow up on the claims in the statement and gather any additional information they can.
    4. The investigators write up their own report to be appended to the statement.
    5. The statement (including the investigators' report) is officially entered into the archives, where it is given a reference number so that if further information comes along later (in future statements or reports), it can be cross-referenced in the system.

THE ARCHIVIST

If there's an institute with archives, there's almost certainly an archivist.

Obviously, in the podcast, Jonathan Sims serves the role of the archivist, and he's our main character. When people think of *The Magnus Archives*, they think of him.

But in your game, the archivist can be whomever you choose. They can be a cranky old man, an energetic young woman, or a dark, mysterious figure. You could even have one of the PCs be the archivist, although it would be recommended that—like Jonathan in the podcast—they start out pretty inexperienced and ignorant.

The archivist maintains the archives. They give investigators their assignments and collect and collate all the information. They almost certainly know the contents of the archives better than anyone else.

But, as you know from the podcast, the archivist isn't necessarily the head of the organization. There is a director or head of the archives. In your game, there could be even more levels of management.

The opportunity to make the archivist be the antagonist rather than the protagonist is a tempting one. It goes in the opposite direction of the podcast, but the archivist is positioned to be a great secret villain, manipulating and using the PCs until the characters uncover their secret. Maybe the archivist has been assigning the PCs specific statements to investigate to lead them down a particular path—perhaps to set them against one of the Entities they wish to target, or to get them to learn a truth the archivist already knows but wants them to discover.

Even if the archivist is not a villain, they don't have to be likeable. They might be distant and aloof, or sarcastic and cruel. They might force everyone on the staff to work long hours, or be a staunch skeptic of all things supernatural and thus seen as difficult to work with by the investigators who encounter the supernatural all the time.

Or maybe the archivist in your game is open and welcoming, and cares deeply for those who work for them. Just don't expect trust to come easily from PCs who are naturally suspicious.

THE ENTITIES AND THEIR FOLLOWERS

Stories in The Magnus Archives RPG hinge on the Entities. They fuel the paranormal happenings and give motivation to the monsters and villains. From that point of view, it's a strength rather than a weakness that there are fourteen of them. When creating your own setting, you can alter them in a myriad of ways.

You don't need to use all the Fears. Or if you want to add one of your own, you can do that too. These modifications are particularly appropriate if you want to tailor the stories to the players. A serious arachnophobe might not want The Web to be in the mix. Maybe in the GM's head, it's difficult to differentiate The Flesh and The Slaughter, so they combine the two into a single Entity. Someone interested in a fear of crowds and public perception and ridicule might be thrilled to have a new Entity focused solely on that. Maybe call them The Other.

In your setting, the Institute might be more or less aware of all the Entities than they are in the podcast. Perhaps your PCs don't have access to Smirke's list and aren't aware that they number fourteen, or that they're based on different fears.

While The Desolation and The Dark have extensive cults in the podcast (and such NPCs are presented in chapter 12), in your campaign, perhaps it is the Cult of the Lidless Tomb and they revere The Buried. Perhaps The Corruption has a cult called the Order of Filth with secret hidden enclaves in sewers, landfills, and other disgusting places. Or The Corruption's cult is the Path of the Plague, and they secretly run the CDC and try to spread disease while pretending to prevent it.

The overall idea is that any of the Fears can be more or less prominent in your setting than they are in the podcast. You can imagine a religion or society devoted to any of them, with their own outlook and tenets.

The Entities, page 166

OTHER IMPORTANT PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS

After the Institute and the Entities, the other aspects of a Magnus Archives game are important but not vital.

RECURRING CHARACTERS

The Deliverymen, page 212

Beyond the protagonists, The Magnus Archives relies heavily on recurring side characters like Mikaele Salesa, Julia Montauk, and Breekon & Hope. Some are foes, some are potential allies, and some dwell in the murky grey area in between. The recurring characters can begin to tie your stories together. If a statement early in the campaign references two strange men in a delivery truck and then later the PCs encounter Breekon & Hope hauling a chained-up coffin, suddenly the previous investigation comes to mind. This kind of thing deepens the overall story and lends verisimilitude to the fictional world.

The Spiral, page 175

Using recurring villains is likely the most straightforward way to do this, and the very concept of Avatars makes it even easier. If the PCs run across an Avatar of one of the Fears and then do so again later, the mere presence of that character tells them something about the new investigation. For example, if the PCs run afoul of an Avatar of The Spiral while investigating what seems like a haunted house, and then later, while on a different assignment, they come upon the mention of that character's name, they know The Spiral is involved somehow. They know what (and who) to look for.

The Book Collector, page 202

The Artefact Dealer, page 199

Dark wardrobe, page 256

Aside from Avatars, having a Book Collector like Jurgen Leitner and an Artefact Dealer like Mikaele Salesa will facilitate your stories. These people are not just resources the PCs can call upon—they're story reasons that explain how objects can move around and not be entirely lost. Need to figure out where the dark wardrobe is? The Artefact Dealer probably knows.

LOCATIONS AND ARCHITECTURE

In the podcast, there are locations of importance beyond the Magnus Institute. Consider Hill Top Road or Millbank Prison, which feature in multiple stories. And even those like Ny-Ålesund that are mainly in one story are important to the entire setting.

While you can use locations from the podcast, you'll want to develop your own locations for your campaign as well. You don't necessarily have to plan them ahead of time. Say, for example, that the PCs investigate a small public library where strange things have happened. There, they find an occult book such as those seen in chapter 13. Then, later, someone giving a statement mentions (in passing) finding an occult book with a library's stamp inside. It's the same library as before, but it's a different book. Now there's something going on. Maybe it's the librarian, or maybe that library has a mystic aspect that draws books there. You didn't intend that innocuous library to become a focal point of the campaign, but suddenly, it is one.

Sometimes, a location should be deliberately designed for its importance. In horror, a location can be more important than the characters in it. Think about the places where the servants of the Entities must perform their rituals. Such locations are almost always significant and thematically appropriate. The People's Church of the Divine Host conducts their ritual in a remote location during an eclipse. The ritual of The Buried involves the creation of an enormous pit. The Stranger's ritual requires a theater. These aren't random choices. Maybe you want to create a cult based around The Slaughter and their sacred spot is an old battlefield or a sunken ship in a harbor. Maybe the Avatar of The Lonely dwells at Point Nemo, the farthest spot on Earth from civilization (mentioned in the podcast, but used in a different way). As they say in real estate, it's all about location, location, location!

Architecture plays an important role in Magnus Archives horror. Robert Smirke, who originally categorized the Entities, was an architect responsible for many locations that had supernatural events in and around them. Don't hesitate to use this in your own campaign. Whether it's Smirke or some other architect, someone designing buildings for occult purposes (perhaps hidden from normal people's awareness) is an intriguing trail to investigate. Encouraging the PCs to find original blueprints of old buildings involved in their investigations is a great way to plant clues, particularly clues from the past. Designing and erecting a building with a paranormal goal in mind is an example of playing the long game, but the realization that the servants of the Entities are that deliberate and organized can be a chilling moment in your story.

BOOKS

Occult books are important to horror settings in the Magnus Archives style. You can use the same books from the podcast stories (they're all in chapter 13), or you can use those as inspiration to create your own.

The point is that they can be sources of real power—and danger—as well as information about the Entities. Remember that it's likely that all supernatural phenomena in your game come from the Entities. Likewise, you won't find useful information about the Entities just anywhere. Lore is its own kind of treasure in this game.

One thing to consider: There are hundreds—probably thousands—of occult books in the real world, including *The Book of Lies* by Aleister Crowley, the *Book of Shadows*, *The Key of Solomon*, and many more. You'll have to decide if any or all of these are as powerful and important as books such as *The Boneturner's Tale* or the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*. Or if the real-world books contain any truth or power at all. You can buy *The Key of Solomon* on Amazon.com, but if you do, will you get a magical book delivered to you by mail? The best answer is probably no, because while there *is* a magical book by that name, there's only one copy (or a few) and the popularized editions of today are incomplete, altered, and useless. Similarly, most of the occult books the PCs can find in a regular bookstore or library are just nonsense. But you can do as you wish, though the question will come up in the game.

ARTEFACTS

Like books, artefacts are interesting, tangible aspects of the Entities' power. You'll find many in chapter 13, ready for use or inspiration. It's easy to create your own. Just think of them less like magic items in other games and more like cursed objects. They might have some use, but they're dangerous. The threat is all part of the fun.

The point of artefacts in your campaign is to provide a way to transfer the supernatural horror from place to place. You can fight a monster. But how do you fight an object? An artefact can, in effect, turn a normal person into a monster. Dealing with an artefact and how it is used (or not), stored, hidden, or maybe even destroyed is an interesting challenge the PCs may have to contend with more than once.

> Long things that wore you like a suit, smiling things that stripped you from your bones, unseen things that watched and watched and watched and never left you. And with each new creation, each new servant, the Fears reached further and fed the things that made them.
>
> And with this newfound power came greed. The hunger for more, the unformed, unfocused, but impossibly huge desire to exist. To join the minds that gave them shape and purpose, and finally drink their fill 'til they were one and the same. They had no concept of how, or when, or even why, but they needed it. They needed it.
>
> —MAG 200: "Last Words"

For more insight on the vital aspects of the setting and the stories, see Magnus Archives Horror in chapter 14, page 345.

You probably shouldn't make so many changes to the setting and its elements—particularly the Entities—that it is unrecognizable as a Magnus Archives game. Particularly for players who have listened to the podcast, having a few familiar elements helps connect it all together and gives them the satisfaction of being part of a setting they enjoy.

THE WORLD OF THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES PODCAST

Here is an extremely brief overview of the world of *The Magnus Archives*. Since the world is utterly changed in season 5, we'll look at that separately.

SEASONS 1 TO 4

The Entities and those who serve them operate in the shadows. Creatures and Avatars spawned by the Entities lie at the heart of most beliefs and stories of the paranormal. Some police forces, faced with supernatural cases now and again, create special classifications like Section 31 or even set up dedicated units to deal with them. For the most part, however, the world is exactly as it appears from most people's point of view.

At the center of the strangeness is the Magnus Institute, founded long ago by Jonah Magnus, who was (secretly) an Avatar of The Eye. Jonah uses various schemes, identities, and subterfuge to control the archives even after his supposed death. New head archivists came along, but they were all chosen and manipulated by Jonah. The current head archivist, Jonathan Sims (as well as his predecessor, Gertrude Robinson—while she was alive), discovers the truth behind the existence of the fourteen Entities as defined by a man named Robert Smirke. As such, they use their ever-growing wealth of information to combat the plans and schemes of those who serve the Fears when they can, such as physically intervening to stop various rituals. But for the most part, they can only catalog the activities of the Entities, often after the fact.

The head archivist also begins to suspect that their own archive serves The Eye and exists to one day see the Watcher's Crown successfully bring The Beholding to the world (with Jonah Magnus himself as The Ceaseless Watcher and master of it all). Eventually, Jonah realizes that to succeed, a ritual must draw in all the Entities. Jonathan, marked by all the Entities due to his actions, becomes the linchpin of the ritual, which succeeds.

SEASON 5

The Eye (manipulated by The Web) has "won." The world has become a nightmare landscape, referred to as the Change or the Age of The Beholding. Time and space no longer retain their conventional meanings, and the whole of the sky is transformed into a huge eye, a manifestation of The Eye itself and its Pupil (Jonah Magnus) watching over everything.

Below the eye, each of the Fears manifests their own domain or domains, overseen by the Avatars they had gathered before. Within the domains, the laws of reality twist to best cultivate the terrible nature of the individual Entities (although there are, occasionally, combinations and mixtures of two Entities within a single domain). The entirety of humanity—with only a few exceptions—is little more than chattel to be constantly tormented for their fears. Never aging or dying, each person exists eternally to provide terror. It is, almost literally, hell on earth.

Jonathan and his companion, Martin, are able to find a few associates (and one or two enemies) immune to the effects of the Change. They also find a few places, including a pocket dimension called Upton House and the tunnels beneath the old Magnus Institute, where the effects of the Change (and the vision of The Eye) are hedged out. With their allies, they work together to restore the world, but the secret truth is that The Web was behind it all. To restore the world, they loose the Entities into the greater multiverse (via the recordings made by Jonathan—the podcast itself), but that was The Web's desire all along, so that the Entities would have limitless populations to exploit and cultivate for their fear.

So, in the end, within the world of *The Magnus Archives* podcast, the Entities are presumably gone. But they exist elsewhere. They exist in your campaign world.

WHAT IF YOU HAVEN'T LISTENED TO THE PODCAST?

First and foremost, you should, because it's excellent.

However, if no one in the game has listened to the podcast, you can still play The Magnus Archives RPG. This book offers a basic overview of the kind of stories, creatures, people, and situations you'll find in the podcast. And honestly, that's all you need. You don't have to be an expert on all the lore and events from the podcast to be the GM or a player. The podcast is more an inspiration for you to create your own setting and stories than it is a sacred text that cannot be deviated from.

But really, just listen to the first couple of episodes, and have the friends you want to play with listen as well. You'll get a great feel for it, and you'll very likely want to listen to more.

Setting a game in the world of season 5 would be, essentially, playing an entirely different game. Rather than investigators, the PCs would be survivors, struggling against the forces of terror. This would be survival/action horror very different from the creepy, slowly building horror in the rest of the podcast. That could be a fun—albeit disturbing—game, but it might also be a rather depressing and hopeless one unless the PCs truly have a chance to save the world. And, of course, "saving the world" is likewise normally out of the scope of a typical Magnus Archives campaign.

OTHER POSSIBLE SETUPS

The world of The Magnus Archives presents many interacting pieces to play with. The Entities and their followers with their different agendas and resources alone are enough to fill multiple campaigns, but when you factor in the artefacts, the books, the creatures, and of course the archives itself, the possibilities grow exponentially greater.

ALTERNATE ARCHIVES

As noted earlier in this chapter, you can have your archives/institute based wherever you wish. There's no reason that the Magnus Institute can't be centered in Chicago, Los Angeles, or Singapore. Or that it even has the Magnus name at all. But what if the forces behind the archives (whatever it is called) are completely different? The possibilities are intriguing.

- The archives are in an underground bunker where information collected by its members is locked away in vaults, the secrets hidden from everyone, but in particular from those who would exploit them. The archivist secretly serves The Buried, but they insist they are hiding the information away for the good of humanity.
- The Institute is a secret agency with ties to the government (or many governments). When any authorities encounter the supernatural, the case is turned over to the secret agency. Beyond simply cataloging data on the supernatural or fighting those who would use it for ill, the archivist is the heart and mind at the center of a vast network serving The Web, manipulating the world and its people. Almost no one has ever heard of this very secret organization, and even those who have think of its members as little more than "ghostbusters." Secrets within secrets.
- The Hunt is the driving force behind the Institute, which exists mainly to gather intelligence so hunters can track, find, and destroy paranormal entities and those who serve them. But ultimately (known to only a few) the goal is to make The Hunt transcendent.
- There is no Institute, but there should be. Someone needs to begin to assemble evidence of the paranormal and perhaps do something about it. The PCs must establish the institution, determine its goals, and set up how it will work. Of course, the forces of the supernatural are arrayed against them at every turn.

DIFFERENT WAYS THE ENTITIES ACT AND INTERACT

In the podcast, while all the Fears make their horrific appearance in the stories and the statements, some—such as The Spiral, The Dark, and of course The Eye—are more prominent than others. But in your game, you can focus on any Entities you wish. A few different setups could include:

- The most prominent Entities are The Flesh and The Slaughter, and worst of all, they work in conjunction. Their followers form a single (though contentious) cult of blood and murder. This organization of serial killers prowls the shadows of the world, leaving grisly shrines to their gods, as their leaders attempt to fuse the rituals tied to both Fears to manifest them together.
- The Extinction is ascendant, and the human race is endangered. While The End, The Slaughter, and The Corruption benefit from increasing wars and disease, the real danger—The Extinction—is behind the rapidly advancing climate crisis that will make the planet uninhabitable for humans. The followers of The Extinction have infiltrated mega corporations and are steering their actions and inactions to further the ultimate victory of their master. Those interested in saving humanity may even find that the only way to win is to work alongside those who serve the other Entities, as most of them don't want to see all of

humanity come to an end, just the unprofitable bits.

- The Lonely has manipulated the world via a global pandemic. People are isolated, and this isolation keeps most of the Fears from making gains. Instead, new manifestations of madness and transformation shape the humans in isolation, turning them into hunters that crave The Flesh, The Slaughter, and more, although each remains tainted with The Lonely. Cases involve these new hunters preying on the isolated victims of The Lonely, but information is difficult to obtain due to everyone's seclusion and fear of contact. Meanwhile, the Avatars of The Lonely grow very close to performing the Silence, their ritual, successfully.
- No one knows The Web exists—not even the forces behind the other Fears. Long ago, the followers of The Web successfully completed their ritual, and their Entity has completely entwined its strands throughout reality. The other Entities attempt to manifest through their own rituals but always fail because The Web has already won. The archivists discover this—as only those aided by The Eye could—and seek a way to unravel The Web, which is the source of all the distrust and paranoia so pervasive in the world.

ALTERNATE CHARACTERS

Chapter 12 presents the various Avatars and people as generalized roles. It doesn't give stats for Jurgen Leitner; it gives stats for The Book Collector. This is so you can make those characters your own whenever you wish. In fact, it's to encourage you to do so. Here are a handful of ideas.

- The Book Collector is a young woman who inherited the collection from her mother (whom she murdered). She's far more interested in the books' monetary value than their occult power or knowledge, but she knows to treat them carefully nonetheless.
- The Chosen of Flame is an old man who was always reluctant to carry out his "destiny," but now in his twilight years, he's going to give it a try.
- The Deliverymen use a stolen truck with the logo of an extremely successful online retailer, posing as employees of that company.
- The Artefact Dealer is actually two people, a man and woman who might be siblings, but no one knows for sure. Their operation also smuggles drugs and other contraband, but only as a cover and to pay the bills in between artefact deals.

USING OTHER MATERIAL

While *The Magnus Archives* podcast has its own "brand" of horror, it incorporates some of the familiar aspects of horror in general, by giving them a fresh take and tying them into its overall cosmology. For example, there are vampires, but they don't follow the traditional rules we see in other vampire stories. This works so well, in fact, that it can be done with other horror tropes as well. Anything that brings fear—virtually any type of horror story, creature, or idea—can be made to fit into a Magnus Archives RPG campaign.

This is a great thing for GMs. In addition to using elements from the podcast and new things you create, you can take almost anything you want from other horror tales or myths and incorporate them into your campaign. Doing so may seem to break away from "canon," but it still retains the mood, feel, and fear-based themes of The Magnus Archives.

Consider, as examples, Bloody Mary, the Hat Man, and the Mothman.

BLOODY MARY

Bloody Mary exists as a legend turned urban myth and has found her way into many cultures as a ghostly figure that can be conjured while looking into a mirror in the dark. While there are many different versions of the myth, the differences come in the form of how she can be summoned and what she does once she appears. Some say that one must walk up the stairs backward while looking into the mirror to summon her, and she will show you a glimpse of the future if you do. Others say that the room can only be lit by candles and that she's looking for vengeance upon those who killed her.

The truth is much more straightforward. Mary—her last name now lost—was an early Avatar of The Flesh. So obsessed was she with her body that she performed all manner of acts of invasive mutilation, carving away her own flesh to the point that nothing remained other than her spirit. But she hungered for more. She struggled to remain in the physical world, and through sheer force of will, she managed to find a way. Of a sort.

Now Mary can only exist within the reflection of a living person. She must be knowingly summoned by someone looking into a mirror in the dark, after midnight, and calling her name thirteen times. Drawn by a desire for their flesh—for she has none of her own—Mary can emerge from the mirror and attack her summoner or someone else reflected in the mirror. She attempts to enter the person's body and, if successful, creates of them a sort of flesh puppet that she controls, albeit somewhat awkwardly.

Under her control, the victim acts erratically, always with a maniacal grin. She speaks, she dances, she gets her hands on the largest available knife and goes to work on whomever is near. And if no one is near, the puppet carves away at her own flesh until it dies, and Mary returns to her odd half-existence in the reflections of others. If someone manages to keep her victim from killing themself before the sun rises, Mary is forced to flee the body she's taken and wait for the next summoning.

The Last Feast, the ritual of The Flesh, becomes far more potent if Mary participates in it, in the body of a hapless puppet.

THE HAT MAN

Another urban legend, reports of the Hat Man come from across the world. This shadowy, mysterious figure appears in the background, always in a trench coat and the eponymous hat, either a wide-brimmed fedora or a top hat.

The Hat Man's domain appears to be dreams, or perhaps more specifically that hypnagogic realm between sleep and wakefulness. As such, he is a creature of The Spiral. He can be considered an Avatar, although it's unclear if he was ever human. He might be more closely related to the shadow people, themselves creatures walking the fine line between The Dark and The Stranger.

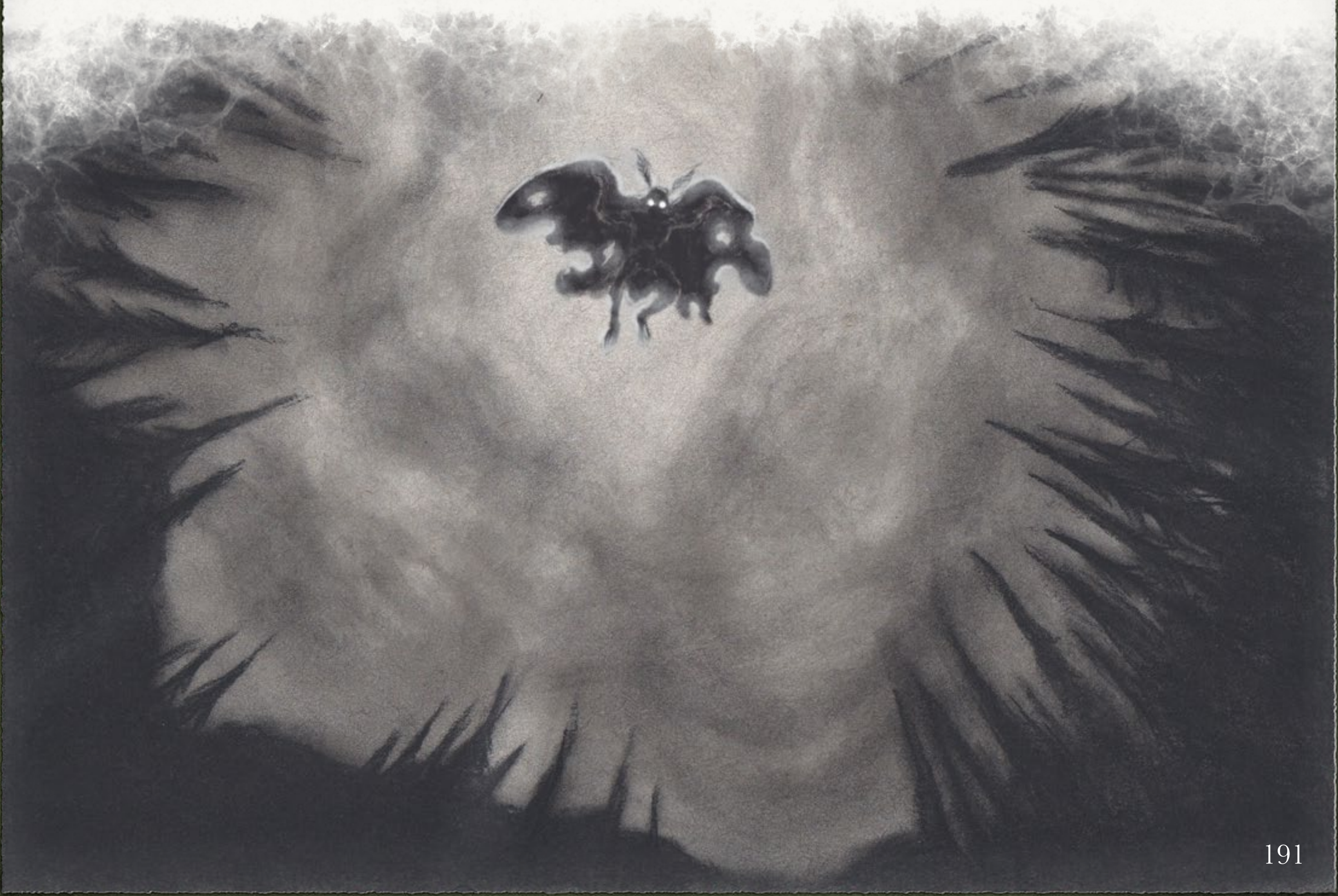
Some people abuse certain medications to commune with this being, believing that he might have secrets to impart. Which he does, although his gifts are simply disorientation, hallucinations, and confusion. In fact, the Hat Man exists primarily as a hallucination himself—a conscious (?) hallucination that gathers more fear around himself the more people that interact with him or even see him.

The Hat Man never commits acts of violence directly. He simply allows his presence to do his work for him.

MOTHMAN

Neither moth nor man, the Mothman is a being that glides through the night on massive wings with red glowing eyes that pierce the darkness like lances. Like the Hat Man, the Mothman doesn't threaten humans physically. Of course, those who witness a manifestation of the Mothman don't realize that it (not he, despite the name) poses no physical danger, and its frightful appearance certainly suggests otherwise. To make matters worse, the Mothman's psychic presence drains those who encounter it.

Strangely, the Mothman may be a creature of The Extinction, as many see its presence as a precursor to catastrophic disaster or change. To be clear, however, it doesn't cause calamity—it only preys on it, coldly awash in the terror and misery of those experiencing it.



CHAPTER 12

MONSTERS AND NPCs

The monstrous beings that feed on humanity's dread are manifestations of fear itself: aspects, agents, and Avatars of the Entities. Some are partly human, retaining human wants and needs, even as they host a horrific hunger that grows more gruesome and terrifying over time, sometimes even to themselves. Other monsters are more "elemental" in aspect, like memes given a ghastly life all their own.

The Entities, page 166

Everything true of monsters regarding stats is also true of NPCs.

Some lore has it that only Avatars of The Hunt can kill other Avatars. However, evidence seems to suggest otherwise.

`The other things that stalk us, from what I know of them, they have varying wills of their own. All in service of the thing they're a part of, but not directly controlled by the mind beneath them. At least, inasmuch as these Entities have something we could recognise as a mind.`

`—MAG 80: "The Librarian"`

HOW MONSTER STATS WORK

Level: Each monster has a level. The level determines three things about the monster, unless an exception is noted later in the monster's stats. (Many monsters have such exceptions.)

The level determines the target number a PC must reach to attack or defend against the monster; the base target number is three times the level. (For ease of reference, the target number for each monster is listed in parentheses after its level in each entry.)

Unless otherwise noted, the level determines the monster's health, which is the same as the target number: three times the level.

The level also determines how much damage a monster inflicts in combat.

Stress: This graphic indicates the amount of Stress a PC takes when they first realize the monster is horrific, usually on a failed Intellect defense roll. The Stress could be dealt immediately upon seeing the monster, or only after it reveals its uncanny nature.

3

Not all monsters have a visage or obvious behavior that inflicts Stress or related secondary effects.

Description: Following the name of the monster is a general description of its appearance, nature, intelligence, or background.

Related Entity: The Entity (or in some cases, multiple Entities) each monster is linked to adds an additional dimension to the encounter. Which means that you've got leeway to move beyond the numbers and explicit abilities to tweak an encounter in a way you suspect will freak out one or more of your players using a particular Entity's theme. That's the ultimate goal of these monsters, after all: to survive and grow stronger by feeding on human terror.

Health: This number is the amount of damage a monster can sustain before it is dead or incapacitated. For easy reference, the entries always list a creature's health, even when it's the normal amount for a creature of its level.

Damage Inflicted: Generally, when monsters hit in combat, those of level 1 to 3 inflict 1 point of Stress per level, and those of level 4 or higher inflict a serious injury. Some inflict more or less or have a special modifier to damage. Intelligent NPCs often use weapons, but this is more a flavor issue than a mechanical one. This is because regardless of the form of attack, a monster or NPC inflicts the damage indicated rather than what might be listed elsewhere for a weapon. In other words, it doesn't matter if a level 3 foe uses a sword or claws—it deals the same damage if it hits. The entries always specify the amount of damage inflicted, even if it's the normal amount for a monster of its level.

Movement: Movement determines how far the monster can move in a single turn. Monsters have movements of immediate, short, long, or very long, which equate to the ranges of the same names.

Most PCs have an effective movement of short, so if they are chasing (or being chased by) a monster with immediate movement, their Speed tasks are eased; if the monster's movement is long or greater, the PCs' Speed tasks are hindered.

Modifications: Sometimes monsters do certain things better or worse than their base level would suggest. This entry gives any such modifications. For example, this entry for a level 4 monster might say "Speed defense as level 5 due to size," which means PCs attacking it must roll a target number of 15 (for difficulty 5) instead of 12 (for difficulty 4) because the monster is smaller and harder to hit.

Combat: This entry gives advice on using the monster in combat, usually indicating the most common way it attacks, plus one or more additional abilities and traits it has that are related to combat, or effects that might linger with PCs as a consequence of having fought it.

Special immunities and/or vulnerabilities the monster has are also described in this section.

However, when GMing a monster, be logical about its reaction to a particular action or attack by a PC. For example, a monster made of rock and dirt (such as a buried thing) is immune to normal diseases or being poisoned (at least, with conventional poison).

Buried thing, page 204

Interaction: This entry gives advice on using the monster in interactions with the PCs, such as "These creatures are dangerous but willing to negotiate to overcome a common foe."

Use: This entry provides straight-to-the-GM commentary about the intention behind the monster and its role in an adventure. That includes guidance on whether the monster is something the PCs could deal with—or something to be hopefully avoided or survived.

GM Intrusion: This entry suggests at least one way to use a GM intrusion in an encounter with the monster. These are just ideas, and the GM is encouraged to come up with their own uses of the game mechanic.

GM Intrusions, page 120

Special Situation: A Chase, page 138

MONSTERS BY LEVEL

Level	Monster	Level	Monster	Level	Monster
1	Silver worm	4	Watcher's husk	6	The Flesh Hive
3	Bewebbed puppet	5	Dabbler	6	The Friendless
3	Buried thing	5	Deceitful arc	6	The Hunter
3	Clown doll	5	Lonesome crowd	6	The Jigsaw Lady
3	Cultist, Divine Host	5	The Artefact Dealer	6	The Man Who Wasn't There
3	Cultist, Lightless Flame	5	The Book Collector	6	The Ringmaster
3	Greyling	5	The Deliverymen	6	The Sandman
3	Mirror haunt	5	The Plaguebearer	6	The Taker of Light
3	Perfect stranger	5	The Tome Hoarder	7	Death
3	Skin shell	5	The Vampire Hunter	7	The Anglerfish
4	Grinning wheel	6	Disciple of the Endless	7	The Archivist
4	Lightless beast	6	Monster Pig	7	The Weaver
4	Meat with eyes	6	NotThem	8	The Chosen of Flame
4	Possessed cannibal	6	The Abiding Watcher	8	The Piper
4	Uncanny mannequin	6	The Boneturner		
4	Vampire	6	The Distortion		

CREATING YOUR OWN MONSTERS

You can use the general rules for how monsters work to make your own. Use the examples in this chapter as the basis for new creatures or NPCs as you need. Any occult-focused villain you want can be based on a dabbler, for example. Any horrific beast can be a modified version of Monster Pig.

Any creature described here can be given new or different abilities without much work. If, in your campaign, a lightless beast can divide into multiple shadowy beings, you can simply note that it can become up to three level 2 versions of itself, each able to act independently, but also operating as lower-level monsters with lower health and damage inflicted. Those kinds of changes are so easy, a GM can make them on the fly.

For more information, see Creating New Creatures in chapter 14, and for examples of new creatures pulled in from other sources, see Using Other Material in chapter 11.

Creating New Creatures, page 320

Using Other Material, page 189

PODCAST CHARACTERS BY NAME

Looking for your favorite podcast characters? Their entries can be found on these pages:

Angela, page 223
John Amherst, page 233
Sarah Baldwin, page 238
Elias Bouchard/Jonah Magnus, page 196
Breekon & Hope, page 212
Annabelle Cane, page 246
Michael Crew, page 214
Simon Fairchild, page 214
Trevor Herbert, page 244
Jared Hopworth, page 201
Mary Keay, page 240
Jurgen Leitner, page 202
Peter Lukas, page 219
Agnes Montague, page 205
Jane Prentiss, page 218
Maxwell Rayner, page 239
Helen Richardson, page 216
Mikaele Salesa, page 199
Jonathan Sims, page 198

> ADMIRAL (CAT): [meows]
>
> ARCHIVIST: Hello Admiral, how’ve you been? I’ve missed you too. I just—I’m trying to . . .
>
> (Sighs) Fine, you want a belly rub, alri- aaargh. Wrong hand, cat, wrong hand. Ah-hah . . . just . . . Sorry Admiral, it—it’s been a hard few days.
>
> ADMIRAL: [purrs]
>
> ARCHIVIST: Hope I haven’t upset Georgie too much. How can she be mad? She’s got you. Er, yep, that’s your arse. Thanks for that. Look, I know, I love you too, but can I have my lap back? I kind of . . . I kinda need to—Aaah . . . Okay. Okay. Belly rubs. You don’t have to worry about all this stuff, do you? A bit over your head, I guess. Bet the world ends, and you do just fine.
>
> ADMIRAL: [stops purring]
>
> —MAG 93: “Contaminant”

OTHER ENCOUNTERS

Besides monsters and NPCs touched by the Entities, PCs are certain to run into regular people and a few animals during their adventures. Unlike most monsters in this chapter, normal NPCs and animals are simple and understandable enough to be encapsulated by just a name and a few stats.

ANIMALS

Creature	Level	Modifications
Cat	1	Speed defense as level 3
Cougar	3	Attacks and Speed defense as level 5
Coyote	3	Attacks and stealth as level 4
Dog	2	Perception as level 3
Dog, guard	3	Attacks and perception as level 4
Horse	3	Moves a long distance each round
Rat	1	—
Shark, great white	5	Swims a long distance each round; health 20

PEOPLE

Type	Level	Modifications
Armed henchman	2	Short-range firearm attack deals serious injury
Mugger	2	Knife deals 3 points of Stress
Police officer	3	Baton or short-range firearm attack deals serious injury
Private investigator	3	Perception, initiative, and detecting lies as level 5
Professional, blue collar	3	Knowledge/skills related to profession as level 4
Professional, white collar	2	Knowledge/skills related to profession as level 4
Security guard	2	Perception as level 3
Store clerk	2	—

THE ABIDING WATCHER 6 (18)

The Abiding Watcher plays the long game, moving from body to body down the centuries, beholding.

In his latest form, The Abiding Watcher is a diffident man sporting an old-fashioned haircut who seems far too young for his role. On the other hand, his eyes are cold and grey, and somehow much older.

The Eye, page 172

Related Entity: The Eye
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Perception as level 9

Combat: The Abiding Watcher might pummel a target with a handy improvised weapon like a hammer or metal pipe. Otherwise he relies on his supernatural abilities.

Alter Memory: A target The Abiding Watcher can see who fails an Intellect defense roll gains a short memory or piece of information (or disinformation). He can use the same ability to insert recorded visual information or CCTV security camera footage.

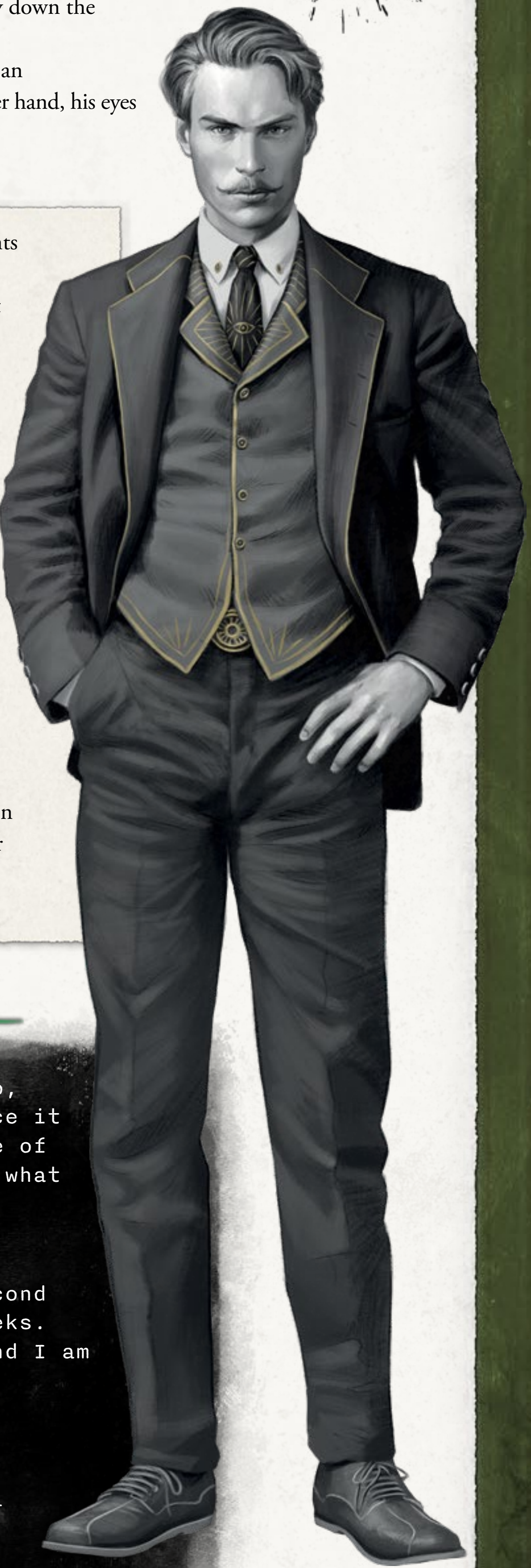
Body Hop: After "operating" on a helpless target for one hour, The Abiding Watcher's consciousness passes into the target if the target fails three Intellect defense rolls (made once each round) before succeeding on three. If The Watcher hops into the body, the target's eyes are replaced with his previous body's eyes.

Eye of Knowing: If The Abiding Watcher wants to know something, he concentrates on the topic. If he attempts to know something about a character, the character must succeed on an Intellect defense roll to keep their secret.

Open the Eye: The Abiding Watcher can use his action to see out of any eyelike object or image, camera, or actual eye anywhere in the world not protected against such supernatural scrutiny. If he attempts to see from a character's eye, a successful Intellect defense roll prevents him.

Interaction: The Abiding Watcher only reveals his true nature to those who've already guessed it. He doesn't reveal the *real* reason he observes and sometimes even attacks other Avatars: He plans to enact the Watcher's Crown, a ritual to make The Eye ascendent.

Use: The PCs might meet The Abiding Watcher in some other guise, possibly as the leader of their paranormal investigation group.



The Watcher's Crown, page 172

> ELIAS: I can see almost anything I care to, read knowledge from someone's mind or place it there, but I just cannot change the nature of a person. And I am struggling to think of what could rid you of this misguided rage.
>
> MELANIE: So let me go. Or kill me.
>
> ELIAS: [Sighing] You know, that is the second such ultimatum I have heard in as many weeks. But no, there are always other options. And I am not above threats.
>
> MELANIE: Threaten, then. I've got nothing.
>
> ELIAS: That's almost true. Your life is indeed shockingly absent of any meaningful connections. That's actually one of the reasons I chose you for this job.
>
> —MAG 106: "A Matter of Perspective"

GM intrusion: *The character feels a distant call, which they feel compelled to investigate on a failed Intellect defense roll. It leads them to The Abiding Watcher.*

The Abiding Watcher's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Elias Bouchard (the most recent in a string of stolen identities reaching back to Jonah Magnus).*

THE ANGLERFISH 7 (21) 3

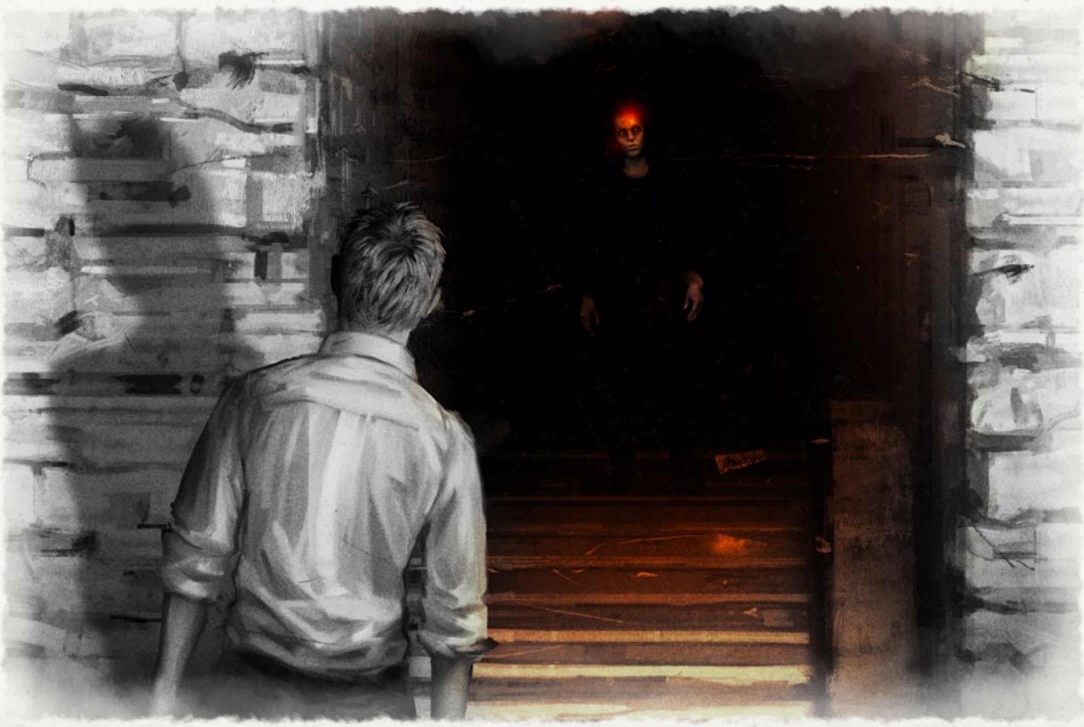
The Anglerfish lures victims into the darkness to steal them (and their skin). Someone's creeping sense that something's wrong may save them, but not from the horrific memory.

The Stranger, page 175

Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 23
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Stealth as level 8; persuasion as level 2
Combat: The Anglerfish bites, but only on a target who moves to help its humanoid lure or follow the lure into the darkness.
The Anglerfish also has the following traits.
Skinner: The skin of a target bitten by The Anglerfish begins to lift and peel. A target killed by such bites is usually never seen again as they were. But see Allied Skin Shell.
Allied Skin Shell: A victim of the Skinner ability may reappear later as a taxidermized skin shell. The Anglerfish may manifest near one or more skin shells fashioned from the skin of past victims. If so, the allied skin shell may cajole or trick a target toward The Anglerfish's lure.
Withdraw: If directly targeted or if it otherwise risks being revealed, The Anglerfish withdraws its lure, which folds at the waist and jerks back into the darkness. The Anglerfish quietly and stealthily escapes all onlookers who fail a perception task against its stealth modifier (level 8).
Interaction: The Anglerfish speaks only via its humanoid-shaped lure (though the lure's mouth doesn't move), repeating the single phrase it's hit on to entice potential prey into the darkness, such as "We've got one down here. Come on, I'll show you," in an almost mechanical-sounding voice.
Use: The Anglerfish is something the PCs could probably encounter and survive, assuming they don't take the bait. Those that do are in serious peril, even if aided by an entire group.

> They didn't come closer, didn't make any movement at all except for that damn swaying. For some reason the thought of an anglerfish popped into my head, the single point of light dangled into the darkness, hiding the thing that lures you in. "Can I have a cigarette?" It spoke again in the same flat voice and I realised exactly what was wrong. Its mouth was closed, had been the whole time. Whatever was repeating that question, it wasn't the figure in the alleyway. I looked at their feet and saw that they weren't quite touching the ground. The stranger's form was being lifted, ever so slightly, and moved gently from side to side.
>
> —MAG 1: "Anglerfish"

Skin shell, page 238



GM intrusion: *The character witnessing The Anglerfish withdrawing its lure must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or gain 3 Stress.*

THE ARCHIVIST 7 (21)

A slight fellow, The Archivist has prematurely greying hair and often looks like he hasn't slept in a week. He's scarred from past paranormal encounters, including pocks from burrowing worms, discoloration on his hand from a burn, and various other marks.

The Archivist's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Jonathan Sims.*

The Archivist is invested in cataloguing paranormal events, people, objects, and monsters. To this end, he gathers statements of those involved, often recording them on a handy recorder. Subjects usually provide their statements willingly (or have previously written them out, which The Archivist records). But The Archivist can compel a reluctant subject, shattering their peace of mind even as the statement somehow nourishes The Archivist.

The Eye, page 172

Related Entity: The Eye

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress

Movement: Short

Modifications: Attacks and Might as level 3; all knowledge-based skills, languages, and secrets as level 8

Combat: The Archivist rarely attacks physically, preferring to flee or, if need be, try one of his special abilities to neutralize a foe:

Compel Statement: If The Archivist asks a subject within immediate range to answer a question or provide a statement on a given topic, they must do so on a failed Intellect defense roll. Questions must be answered truthfully. Compelled statements last for ten to twenty minutes, during which time the subject can do nothing else but speak completely truthfully, unless they take damage, which breaks the effect.

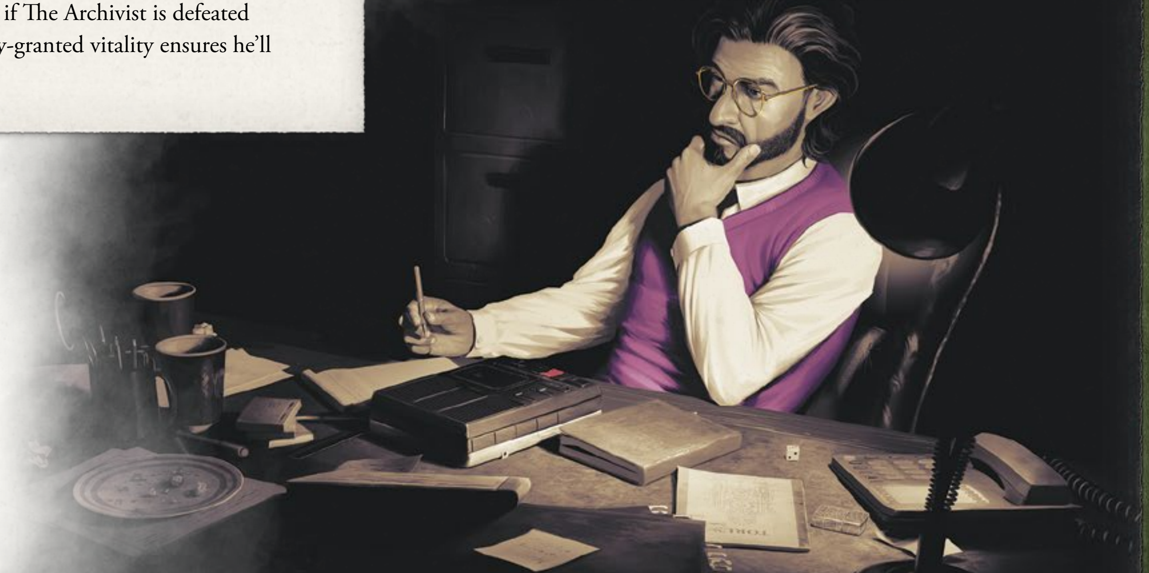
Afterward, nightmares plague the subject, hindering their Intellect-based tasks for several months or longer.

Beholding Vitality: The Archivist regains 1 point of health each round (even at 0 health) or 10 health on the round in which he finishes taking a statement.

Interaction: Sometimes rude and scornful, The Archivist can show genuine compassion to those affected by the Entities and their Avatars, including those affected by his own abilities. In truth he's also afraid of many of the things he learns about in his statements.

Use: Though not physically intimidating, The Archivist can use his ability to compel the truth—or a statement—from a character to interrupt any violence in the offing. And even if The Archivist is defeated by concentrated drubbing, his Entity-granted vitality ensures he'll eventually return.

> I just, I just sorta turn, you know, just, just to check if he's still there and he is standing right behind— Like, like a few inches from my face. Look, it's messed up!
>
> And I start to ask him, you know, what the hell, man, you know? Like— But he just starts talking. Slowly. But real intense. He says, he works here, at the, the Magnus Institute, and I say, what even is that and he says, he wants my story. He says he needs to hear what happened to me. And I—I want to tell him to j-j-just go away. I want to, to, to kick him and run. But I— (long sigh) I sit down. And I start to tell him everything. About the job, about the collapse, a-about the hand. More than I told you, even, and, and as I do—it's like I'm there again. Like I can feel it grab my ankle, th-th-that cold, dead hand and I just . . . I just can't stop talking. I cannot shut up.
>
> —MAG 142: "Scrutiny"



GM intrusion: *The Archivist compels the character to take a specific action that's something other than answering a question or giving a statement.*

THE ARTEFACT DEALER 5 (15)

His level, even stare appraises people and objects alike, always assessing what value they might possess. He finds most lacking. But he's got an eye for paranormal objects, as well as enough luck and skill to act as a fence for wealthy clients as well as certain agents of the Entities.

The Artefact Dealer's shrewd business sense is only enhanced by his immense stature, his Samoan ancestry, and his close-cropped hair.

The Artefact Dealer's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Mikaele Salesa.*

Related Entity: All
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Occultism as level 7
Combat: In a pinch, The Artefact Dealer attacks with a retractable baton.

He might also have the following prepared.

Associates: The Artefact Dealer is working with two or three bodyguards.

Useful Artefact: The Artefact Dealer uses an artefact to his benefit. For example, he might use the blood money pouch to cause a group of enemies to fall upon themselves, the boatswain's call to summon or disperse thick fog, or some other useful object he's retained for a time before resale.

Interaction: Potential artefact customers are in luck if they find The Artefact Dealer. Those looking for information about his past or future sales find him less forthcoming, though everything has a price.

Use: When the PCs first encounter a situation involving an artefact, they might trace it back to The Artefact Dealer. Later, the PCs may be looking for something in particular, and he's a good option, assuming the PCs don't try to rob him; he's ruthless if his business is threatened.

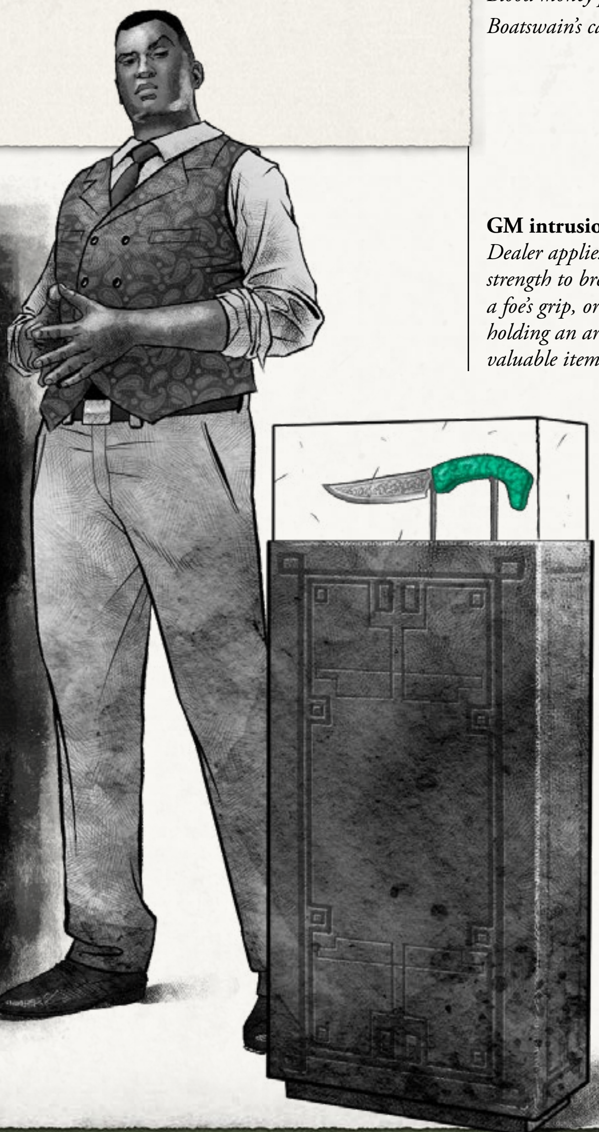
One or two artefacts can usually be found somewhere in the vicinity of The Dealer.

Bodyguard: *level 3*

Artefacts, page 248
Blood money pouch, page 251
Boatswain's call, page 252

GM intrusion: *The Artefact Dealer applies surprising strength to break a restraint or a foe's grip, or into an enclosure holding an artefact or other valuable item.*

> I shined my light in and to my surprise, the crate appeared to be completely empty. I didn't remember it listed on the manifest, but if it didn't contain anything there wasn't necessarily a reason for it to be. I turned back to face Salesa with a shrug.
>
> He no longer looked angry. Instead, his face now had a look of concern. I assumed he was worried I'd found something suspicious, but I shook my head and told him that if he got his documents in order by tomorrow, he could be on his way no problem. Otherwise it was going to get more complicated. The look on his face didn't change. I began to walk out—I had plenty more work to do that day—when he grabbed my arm. His grip was just as strong as I would have guessed and for a second, I was suddenly afraid he was going to kill me. Instead he looked me in the eyes for a long moment before he said, very softly, "Don't go to sleep."
>
> —MAG 66: "Held in Customs"



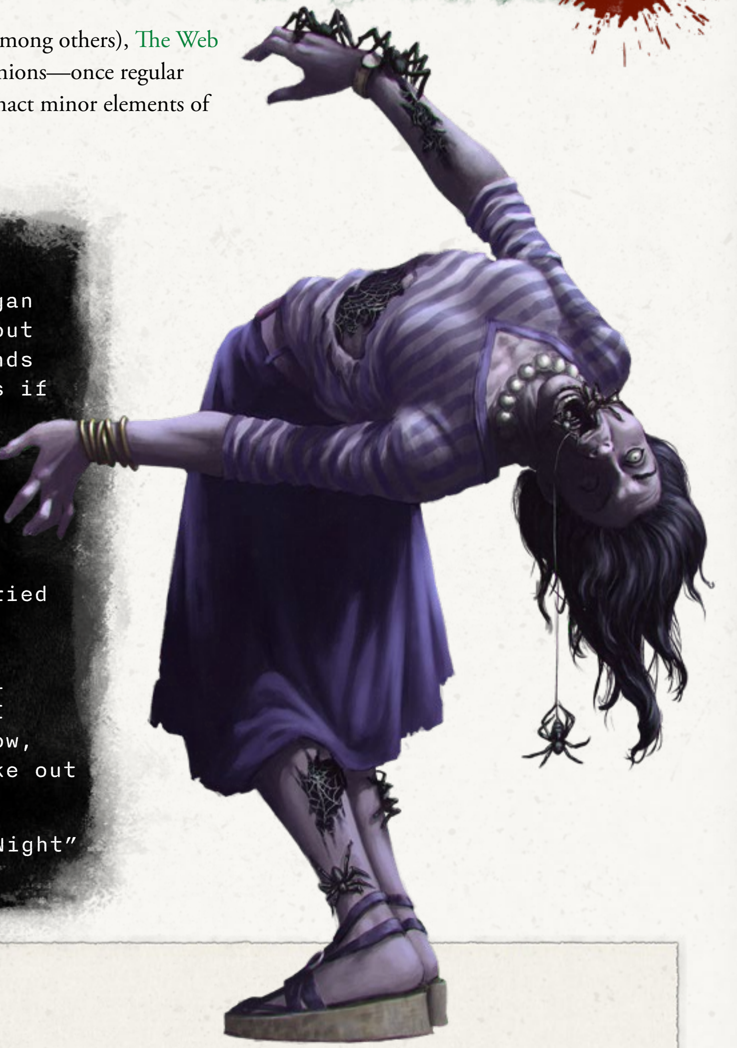
BEWEBBED PUPPET 3 (9)

2

The Desolation, page 171
The Dark, page 171
The Web, page 176
The Weaver, page 246

Unlike The Desolation and The Dark (among others), The Web doesn't often use cultists. Instead, its minions—once regular people—are spider-filled puppets that enact minor elements of The Weaver's plan without question.

> It wasn't a deep cut, or a long one, but apparently it was enough. Her whole body began to shudder, as tiny shapes began to stream out of the wound. Spiders. Thousands and thousands of spiders. She opened her mouth at last, as if to scream, and more poured out. Tens of thousands of skittering legs and evil little eyes. I screamed and started to back up as the dark shapes pooled around her feet and spread out in a twitching circle. For a second I was worried they were coming for me, but then they just scurried off into the shadows and crevices of nearby buildings, until the street was empty of everything, except this woman. She was still standing upright, but from the open mouth, I could see that her body was completely hollow, save for a few cobwebs that I could just make out under the streetlights. I ran the hell away.
>
> —MAG 56: "Children of the Night"



GM intrusion: *The character accidentally swallows one or more spiders.*

Related Entity: The Web
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress
Movement: Short; short while climbing
Modifications: Endurance as level 7
Combat: A bewebbed puppet batters or bites a foe. It also has the following traits.

Paralyzing Venom: A successful bite attack deals damage, and on a failed Might defense roll, the target is paralyzed for up to one minute or until they succeed on a Might defense roll on their turn to end the effect.

Shocking Wound: If the bewebbed puppet takes 5 or more points of damage, thousands of spiders pour out of the wound and the puppet's mouth, revealing that the body is hollow save for webs, more spiders, and spider eggs. Characters witnessing this for the first time are stunned and lose their next turn if they fail an Intellect defense roll. The bewebbed puppet acts normally despite the wound, unless brought to 0 health. The released spiders skitter away.

Web Trap: If the bewebbed puppet has an hour or more to prepare, the spiders inside them emerge to spin a web filling a short area. Perception rolls are required to spot and avoid them. Caught prey is helpless against attacks made against them, and the only physical actions they can take is to attempt to escape with Might-based rolls.

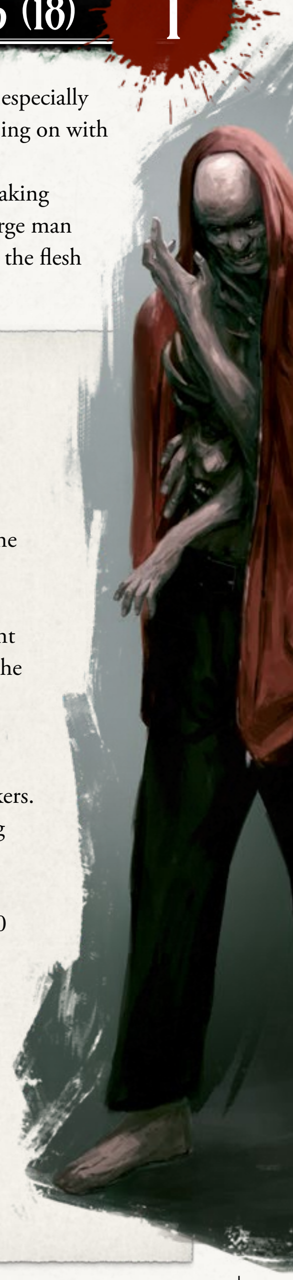
Interaction: From afar, bewebbed puppets seem normal, if absorbed in their tasks. If approached and questioned, they either pretend to be normal or flee (possibly to someplace they've laid a trap). If attacked, they defend themselves.

Use: Characters could dispatch a bewebbed puppet without too much trouble, but the memory of doing so would likely haunt their nightmares for months afterward.

THE BONETURNER 6 (18) 1

Sometimes he's tall and long; other times he stands at a strange angle. When he's moving especially strangely, it might be because he's added some extra limbs. Usually he hides whatever's going on with his body beneath loose clothing and a hoodie.

Like a sculptor in flesh, The Boneturner twists and changes his own body, sometimes taking on a horrific semblance of limbs, meat, and bones, and other times appearing as a very large man with a handsome face. The only thing he enjoys more than remolding himself is molding the flesh and bones of other people.



Related Entity: The Flesh
Health: 24
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Biology as level 8
Combat: The Boneturner attacks with his "boneturning" touch, which twists and pulls the target's flesh.

He also has the following traits.

- *Bone Souvenir:* A target damaged by The Boneturner's touch must succeed on a Might defense roll or The Boneturner removes a rib, cartilage, or a bit of an organ, stunning the target with pain so they lose their next turn.
- *Sculpt Flesh:* The Boneturner can sculpt a helpless (or willing) target into a new form without killing them. Doing so requires a handful of hour-long sessions. At the procedure's conclusion, the target is transformed, usually in a way that horrifies onlookers. Possibilities include something as minor as adding muscle and bone mass to something as extreme as twisting the target into an immobile "flesh orchid" or a headless, legless, multiarmed "perfect" mass.
- *Survival of the Flesh:* The Boneturner regains 2 points of health each round (even at 0 health), or 7 points on any round he takes a Bone Souvenir, which he adds to his own body.

Interaction: The Boneturner is willing to negotiate, but he requires at least one willingly donated bone or other portion of flesh in return for a request.

Use: The Boneturner's threat seems subtle, if gut-wrenching—or more accurately, bone-wrenching. PCs may find him involved in a project that doesn't include them, unless they gain his attention, which could prove lethal even for an experienced group.

The Boneturner either has or knows where to find *The Boneturner's Tale*.

> Then he reached into Hector. No cutting, no saws, he just reached in, and I realised why the room was soundproofed. Because it turned out Hector wasn't dead. And it was going to be a while before The Boneturner got around to his lungs or throat. The Boneturner pulled out what appeared to be a handful of ribs. He considered them for a few moments before he began to twist them like warm putty, making them into some sort of braid. He considered his handiwork silently, as Hector lay screaming on the table, before he shook his head and walked towards my locker.
>
> —MAG 49: "The Butcher's Window"

The Flesh, page 173

The Boneturner's Tale, *page 268*

GM intrusion: *The character who struck The Boneturner feels the flesh retract and draw in the weapon (or the character's fist), like strangely sharpened ribs shifting to grab from within, holding the weapon or fist until the character succeeds on a Might-based roll as their action to get it free.*

The Boneturner's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Jared Hopworth.*

THE BOOK COLLECTOR 5 (15)

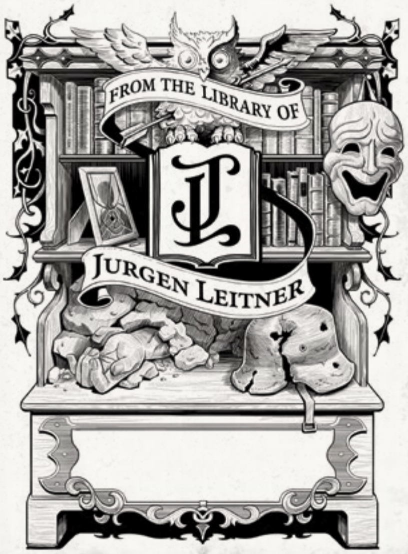
The Book Collector is also sometimes known as The Librarian.

The Book Collector's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Jurgen Leitner.*

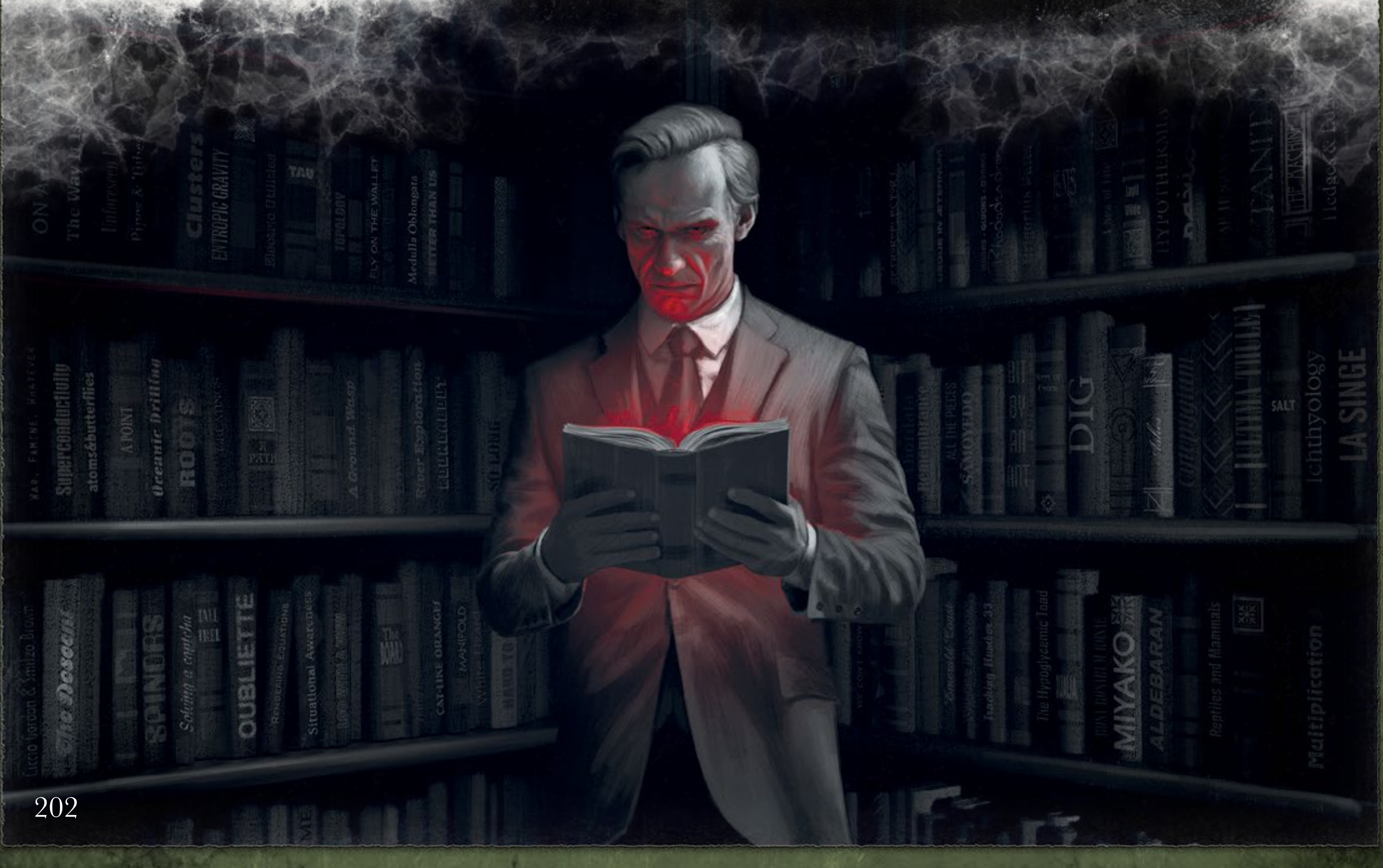
The Book Collector's stamp appears in many dangerous paranormal grimoires, making his a name to conjure with. He tried collecting every last supernatural book to protect the world from their effects.

But his defenses were inward facing, to prevent the books from escaping. He was unprepared when aspects and Avatars who served those same dark powers appeared, first with questions about the collection, then as a coordinated army of horror that utterly overwhelmed the library.

In the aftermath, the collection dispersed back into the world, free to breed malign fear, except for a few The Book Collector retained for himself. With those, he disappeared from the notice of the Entities and everyone else.



> I . . . thought that I could control them; that I alone had the knowledge to contain them. Back then, I believed they were simply books. Horrifying, powerful, yes, but with rules, limits that could be charted. I was a fool. I had no idea what forces lay behind them, or that they had other servants that might come searching.
>
> I was ruthless, I will admit that. I don't know how many assistants I sacrificed to learn the secrets of the volumes I collected. Dozens, at least. Only a few escaped with their life and mind intact, and even then they were deeply marked. But I was relentless. I saw myself as a guardian, a reverse Pandora, gathering the evils of the world and locking them away. And so I branded them with my seal.
>
> —MAG 80: "The Librarian"



Related Entity: Any, usually three or more at the same time

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress

Movement: Short

Modifications: Abilities derived from paranormal books in his possession as level 8; Speed defense as level 3

Combat: The Book Collector is not much for physical confrontation, but the abilities he can call on when he has a "Leitner" close at hand are impressive, assuming he's not interrupted while reading from them.

Reshape Architecture: After he spends one round reading from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, a target The Book Collector can see inside the same structure is trapped as the walls shift and close them off. To escape, the target must overcome a level 8 doorless room (or in some cases a maze) or wait until someone with the same book or ability lets them out.

If he reads from the book for several minutes, The Book Collector could completely redesign a structure or underground location.

Unseen Control: After he spends one round reading from pages salvaged from *The Key of Solomon*, a target in short range is possessed by a level 8 spirit if they fail an Intellect defense roll. The spirit does as The Book Collector desires for eight days (such as spying on the target, making the target forget certain things, making the target act a certain way under specific circumstances, etc.). Each day, the target can make another Intellect defense roll to expel the spirit. Afterward, the spirit is free to leave or to torment the target however it wishes. A possessed character takes 1 point of Stress for each day they were possessed when released from the spirit.

Utter Disappearance: After he spends one round reading from *A Disappearance*, The Book Collector disappears, becoming invisible and intangible, moving beyond even the reach of spells and abilities normally able to see, find, and/or interact with hidden things of level 8 or less, until he chooses to reveal himself.

Other Abilities: If another book (or fragments thereof) falls into his hands, The Book Collector could create additional powerful effects related to that book, but only after reading from it for at least one round.

Interaction: If The Book Collector is encountered, it's because he engineers the meeting. In person, he appears as an old man with short grey hair in a well-tailored business suit. He speaks with a very faint Norwegian accent, but his English is perfect. He retains a bit of hubris for his achievement of creating his library, even though he knows it was a mistake. Whatever the reason for his desire to interact, he's always cognizant of the time; the longer he's visible, the longer agents of the Entities have to find him.

Use: The Book Collector is simultaneously powerful and fragile if he's not prepared. He could make an appearance just when the PCs need extra help bringing loose plot threads together. He might keep an eye on the characters, showing up just in time to save them from an overwhelming paranormal threat. Alternatively, perhaps he feels the PCs are stirring up too much trouble, and he begins intervening against them.

A Disappearance, *page 273*

Leitners, page 267

The Seven Lamps of Architecture, *page 281*

GM intrusion: *Before The Book Collector can help the character, an Avatar of an enemy Entity appears and strikes The Book Collector unconscious.*

The Key of Solomon, *page 278*

> And then the house was complete, and I had my library. A vast, lopsided structure, by turns cavernous or maze-like, depending on the needs of the inmates. By the end, I had nine hundred and seventy-eight volumes in my library. Some innocuous, some unsettling and some utterly murderous.
>
> —MAG 80: "The Librarian"

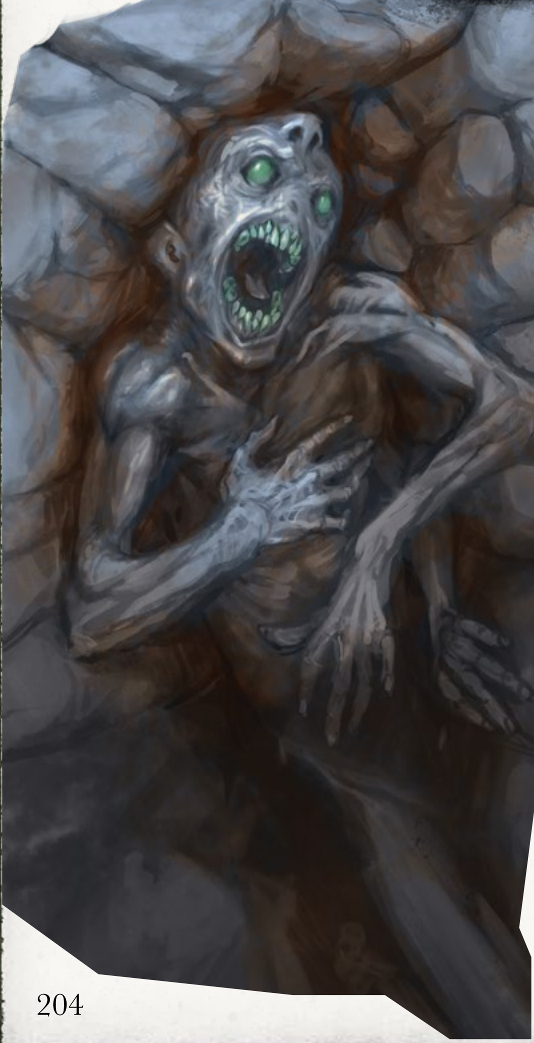
BURIED THING 3 (9) 1

Buried things are like sculptures chiseled by artists who've only heard of people but never seen them: too many fingers, limbs, and other parts not always where they should be.

GM intrusion: *The partly buried character realizes they've been digging down, not up, as they attempt to burrow their way to freedom.*

The Buried, page 170

> I felt something. No, I felt some*one*, grab my ankle. At first it was great, I had this, this huge wave of relief, right? Someone had found me, they were getting me out.
>
> But no, it didn't feel right. It wasn't— It was cold, right? Like . . . like old stone, or wet sand. It felt, like, rough, and, and like the fingers weren't . . . I don't know, it felt like they, they weren't in the right places. And then I started thinking and I realized something. The way it w—it was grabbing me, holding my leg, there was—it had to have been coming upwards. From below me. And there was no one else down there when that tunnel collapsed. Absolutely no one. I'm sure.
>
> So then I start screaming again. And kicking, thrashing about. It hurts but, I mean, I'm scared out of my mind, but the, the hand, it just grips tighter and I can feel its fingernails just . . . It-It-It started pulling. It was pulling down, dragging me down. Into the earth.
>
> —MAG 142: "Scrutiny"



Related Entity: The Buried
Health: 9
Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress
Movement: Short; immediate when burrowing
Combat: A buried thing batters with malformed, stony fingers, usually reaching up from the ground below a target and ambushing them, easing the thing's first attack by two steps.

Buried things also have the following traits and abilities.

Squeeze: A target damaged by the buried thing must also succeed on a Might defense roll or be grabbed. A grabbed target's physical actions are hindered until they can escape with a successful Might roll as their action.

Pulled Deeper: A grabbed target that succeeds on three Might rolls to escape breaks the grab. A grabbed target that fails three escape attempts before succeeding on three is pulled deeper and probably never seen again. A target that doesn't resist is automatically pulled deeper after three rounds.

Collapse: The buried thing causes a portion of an underground tunnel, cave, or corridor to collapse (up to once per day), filling an immediate area with soil and rocks, potentially cutting off one or more targets from easily retreating back to the surface.

Horrific Bruise: A target grabbed by a buried thing retains a horrid, muddy bruise from the fingers. Any time the target ventures underground, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or feel the bruise pulse, summoning a buried thing to investigate.

Interaction: Buried things never speak, only try to cover targets in earth and stone.

Use: A group of PCs won't have much trouble with a lone buried thing. Even so, a buried thing may target a PC on the surface, if only to mark one with a bruise, then burrow away. That makes it easier to locate the bruised PC the next time they venture into a basement, cellar, or subway.

THE CHOSEN OF FLAME 8 (24)

She is tall, with long, straight auburn hair. Her eyes are as piercing as headlights, and just as likely to trap an unwary observer in their penetrating glare. When she manifests her power, she is like the sun, filled with enough heat and rage to burn the world and leave it nothing but desert.

Prone to fits of anger and even violent rage, not even her associates are safe from her. Perhaps that's because she was chosen as a child, rather than chose for herself, to be the "messiah" of the Cult of the Lightless Flame and help bring about a fiery apocalypse.

Cult of the Lightless Flame, page 171

The Desolation, page 171

Related Entity: The Desolation
Health: 24
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Combat: The Chosen of Flame attacks with a touch that sears.
She is immune to heat and flame and also has the following abilities:

Nova: The Chosen flares like the sun (no more than once each day), damaging all creatures within short range. Targets who succeed on a Speed defense roll still gain 2 points of Stress.

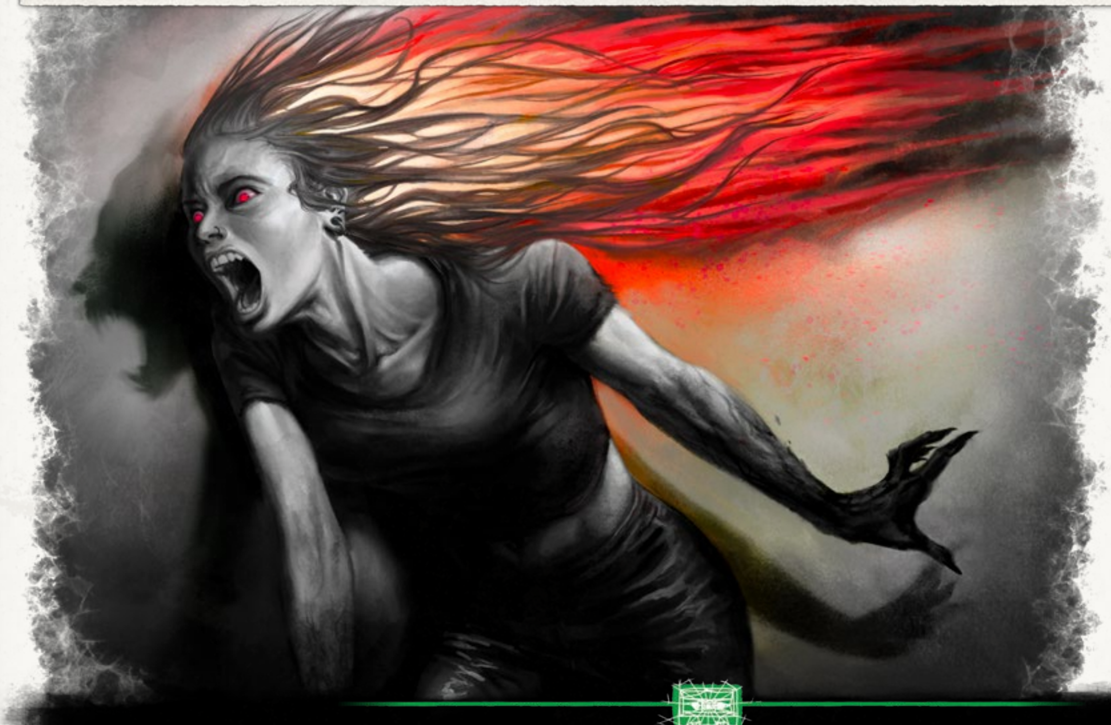
Regenerative Candle Flesh: The Chosen's waxy flesh is as hot as a burning candle and just as malleable. Any round she spends molding her wounds back into shape, she regains 10 health.

Superheat: The Chosen can heat an object within short range as part of another action. The amount of heat injected into the object varies from scalding to melting. Sometimes The Chosen uses this ability without conscious volition.

She can also superheat a target in short range who takes damage on a failed Might defense roll.

Interaction: The Chosen of Flame has only a passing affinity for her own cult despite her status, and may be open to alliances with servitors of other Entities to delay other world-ending rituals. But her temper and volatile nature make alliances potentially lethal.

Use: She might seem intense, but that impression is only a shadow of The Chosen of Flame's true unbelievable power. PCs who try to physically face her head on will probably be burned alive.



GM intrusion: *The character glances at The Chosen of Flame just as her eyes flare with sunlike brilliance, blinding the character for one round.*

The Chosen of Flame's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Agnes Montague.*

> Without warning, she put her hands either side of my head. I realised it was the first time our skin had ever touched and I could feel the intense, hellish heat that radiated from inside her, but it was too late. She leaned in and kissed me. There are no words to describe the pain. My face erupted in boiling agony as I felt my skin start to crack and peel and the heat washed over me, erasing all thoughts in blistering white. I felt the fat in my cheeks liquify and bubble as I tried to scream, but my lips wouldn't work.
>
> —MAG 67: "Burning Desire"

CLOWN DOLL 3 (9)

1

The Stranger, page 175

Inhabited by an aspect of The Stranger, clown dolls (as well as certain puppets, dolls that aren't obviously clowns, and similar playthings) seem unsettling even when encountered in a normal setting, such as on a store shelf, on a child's bed, or packed in a trunk left by a dead relative. Later, the reason why becomes hauntingly clear when the clown doll animates.

Related Entity: The Stranger

Health: 9

Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress

Movement: Short

Modifications: Speed defense as level 5 due to size; stealth and disguise (when not moving) as level 6

Combat: Preferring to attack with surprise, the doll trips—as if by accidental placement—a target down a flight of stairs, or sets up some other apparent accident for the target that might be mistaken as a terrible misadventure.

A clown doll may also use one of the following abilities as its action.

Cursed Effigy: A clown doll targets one person at a time. On the target's failed Intellect defense roll, the doll (if left uninterrupted and unobserved for several hours) "buds" another doll from itself that is an obvious effigy of the target. Whether the target ever learns of the effigy or not, they must succeed on three Intellect defense rolls (one per day) to escape the effect. Each failed defense roll inflicts 1 level of Stress on the target. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they are found dead, their throat crushed and jaw torn clean off. If the effigy is later found, it's also missing its jaw.

If the clown doll and effigy doll are found and separated before the target dies, the curse is lifted.

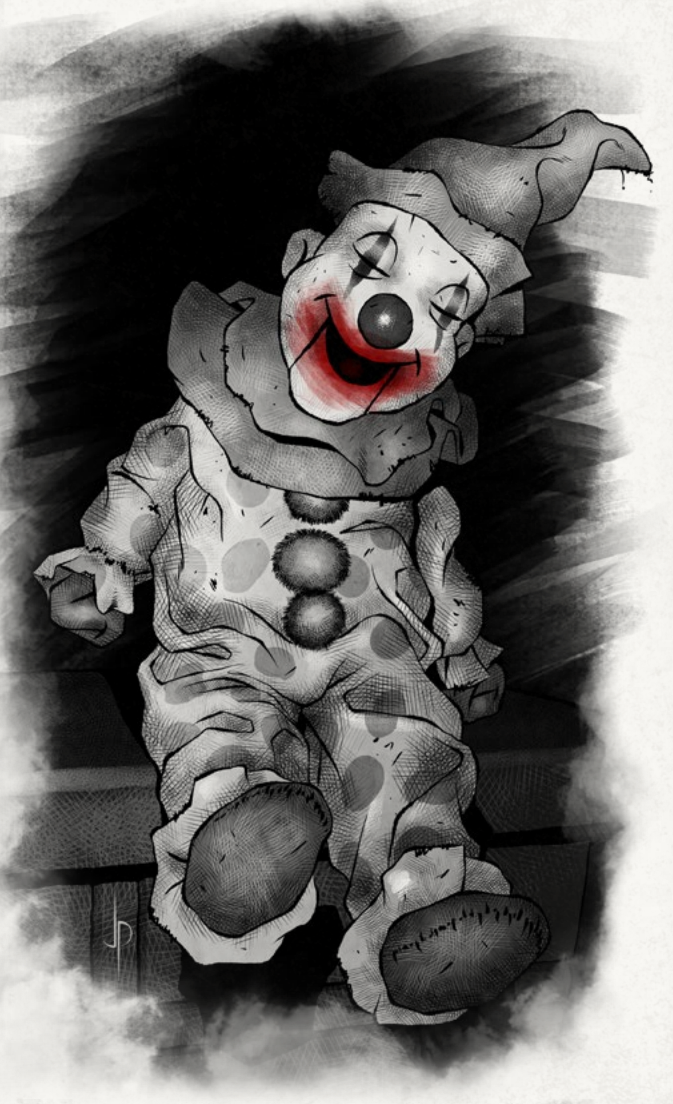
Play Dead: The doll falls limp, appearing as nothing more than a regular doll. In this state, treat it as an object equal to its level until it moves again.

Strangle: The doll wraps the target's throat in its fabric arms and squeezes. If the doll is successful, the target takes damage each round they fail a Might defense roll, until they rip the doll away with a successful Might-based roll.

Interaction: A clown doll smiles its unsettling red smile.

Use: As a group, PCs will find individual clown dolls manageable. It's when a character is alone or surprised that a clown doll can prove a mortal danger.

A clown doll is sometimes found in proximity to a paranormal artefact, such as the calliope.



Calliope, page 252

GM intrusion: *The character finds a second doll that looks somewhat like them.*

> `There were 23 dolls I counted in total, and only one of them still had its jaw intact. It was the oldest looking by far, and was a small clown doll. Its threadbare body was white and purple polka-dot, with three pompoms down the front and a ruff just below the head. It had no woolen hair left, but instead had a tall, pointed white cap on top. Its face was painted a pure white, and its eyes were shut, with black lines drawn across them. The only colour was a splash of red across the hinged jaw. A smile.`
>
> `—MAG 24: "Strange Music"`

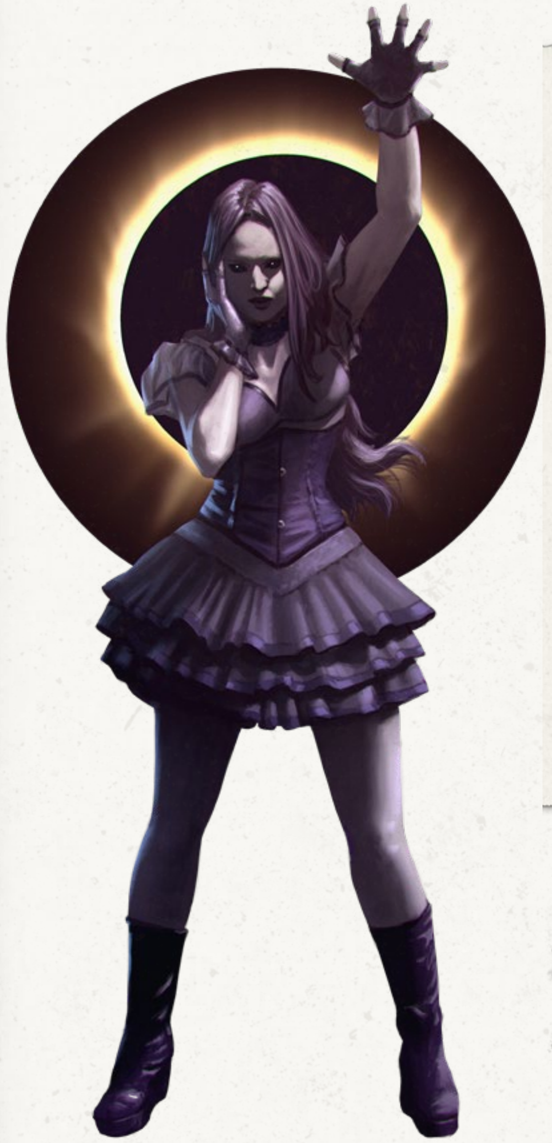
CULTIST, DIVINE HOST 3 (9)

Some people search for another world of peace, of still and quiet darkness, where death cannot find them. Where it's possible to feel a full-body celestial terror at the vast, utterly encompassing eternal night. Such people are perfect candidates for becoming cultists of the People's Church of the Divine Host.

Unless participating in a cult activity, most cultists seem like ordinary people, though many develop strangely dark eyes.

People's Church of the Divine Host, page 171

The Dark, page 171



Related Entity: The Dark
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Discerning motive as level 2
Combat: The cultist attacks with a handy knife, hammer, or firearm.
A given Divine Host cultist might also have one or both of the following abilities:

Dream of the Dark: The cultist attacks a target by meeting the target's gaze (up to once per day). On a failed Intellect defense roll, the target hallucinates that they're wandering beneath an empty, lightless sky of void forever and gains 1 point of Stress. Targets can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to break free; otherwise they are effectively helpless for one minute, after which the hallucination ends.

Empowered Eclipsing Touch: While within short range of an artefact of the Divine Host (such as the dark star) or an Avatar of The Dark (such as The Taker of Light), the cultist's attack with a weapon leaves behind a physical blot of darkness in the wound. The blot inflicts 1 point of Stress each round until the target succeeds on a Might-based roll as their action to rid themselves of it.

Interaction: Cultists of the People's Church of the Divine Host are confident in their beliefs, making them susceptible to falsehoods that play into that dogma.

Use: Divine Host cultists have limited paranormal abilities (if any). Though they're as dangerous as any zealot, competent PCs are likely to prevail against even a group of Divine Host cultists not bolstered by physical proximity to their cult leaders.

Dark star, page 255

The Taker of Light, page 239

CULTIST NAMES

Cultists of the Divine Host come from all walks of life. Sample names include:

Stan Collins, Angela Kin, TJ Chakraborty, Shannon Dramis, Roshani Whitten, William Chao, Ken Carlisle, Saddie Johnson, Mary Levitt, Malcom Agrawal.

> We were to slice a hole in the world, and this paradise would flow through the wound like ink, smothering the sun and all its children. Maxwell had always had the visions, the drive. Whatever was inside him pulled him to this end, to this great undertaking, like a magnet, and I was so very honoured to be his right hand. Natalie and the others followed, but they did not truly understand, with their talk of peace and unity and "Mr. Pitch"—a friendly name to try and hide from a concept they couldn't grasp.
>
> —MAG 143: "Heart of Darkness"

GM intrusion: *The cultist tells a lie so convincing that the character can't help but believe it for at least one round on a failed Intellect defense roll.*

CULTIST, LIGHTLESS FLAME 3 (9)

Cult of the Lightless Flame, page 171

Searching for meaning, purpose, and a community to which they can belong, some people fall into cults before they quite realize what the organization is all about. That's just as true for the Cult of the Lightless Flame as for any other, but soon enough, neophytes realize what's what, and they have to choose. Do they want to embrace the lightless inferno of desolation, of pain and destruction, as their god, or do they want to be burned to ash for daring to leave the cult?

The Desolation, page 171

Unless participating in a cult activity, most cultists look like regular people, though many end up getting a tattoo of a human figure wreathed in the fires of Hell.

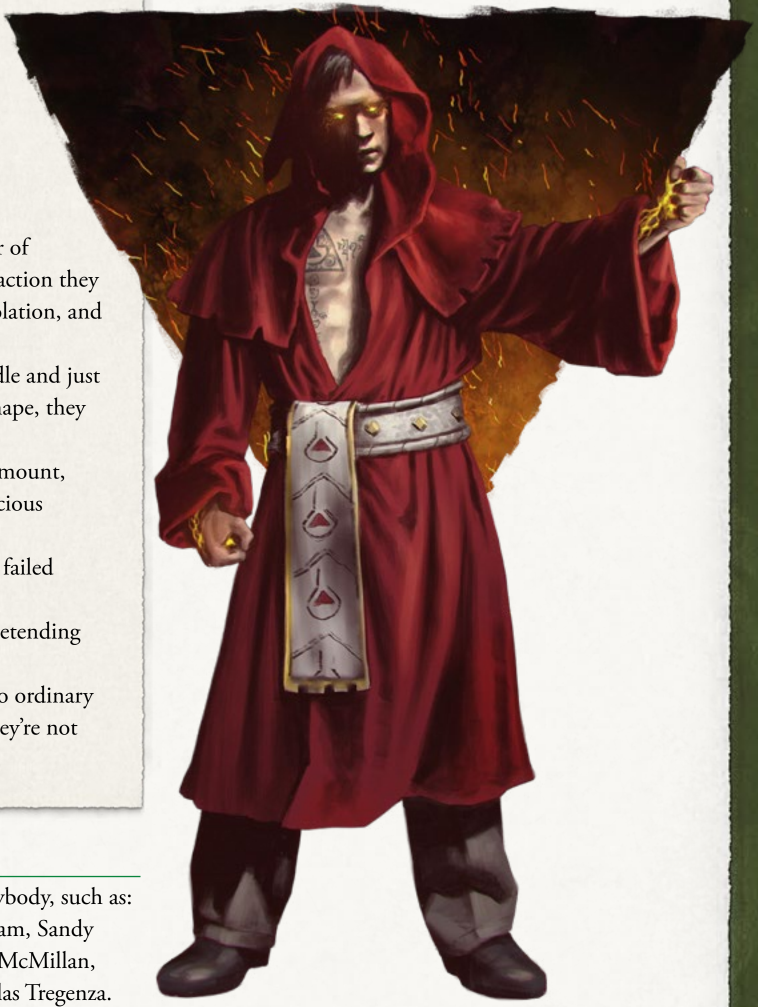
Related Entity: The Desolation
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Discerning motive as level 1
Combat: The cultist attacks with a searing touch.
The cultist also has the following abilities:

- *Death Blaze:* When killed, their corpse bursts into flame. The resulting odor of matches, incense, and cooking pork grants those who smell it an asset to any action they choose within the next day. The target knows the asset is a gift from The Desolation, and if they choose to use it, The Desolation will later ask something from them.
- *Regenerative Candle Flesh:* The cultist's waxy flesh is as hot as a burning candle and just as malleable. Any round the cultist spends molding their wounds back into shape, they regain 4 health.
- *Superheated Breath:* If the cultist blows on an object, it heats up a variable amount, from scalding to melting. Sometimes the cultist uses this ability without conscious volition.

The cultist can also blow on a target in immediate range who takes damage on a failed Might defense roll.

Interaction: Cultists are usually certain in their belief, which means someone pretending to the same devotion is likely to be regarded as a friend.

Use: A step above everyday cultists, Lightless Flame cultists are still susceptible to ordinary violence, though their candle flesh gives them the opportunity to recover if they're not brought into custody or utterly defeated.



CULTIST NAMES

Cultists of the Lightless Flame could be anybody, such as:

Alfie Akoye, Kathrine Joe, Robert Peckham, Sandy Netto, Scott Parody, Cory Laurier, Brenda McMillan, Sean Heldt, Lori Nier, Deidre Case, Nicholas Tregenza.

GM intrusion: *The fist or weapon of the character striking the cultist gets stuck in the cultist's waxy flesh, inflicting 1 point of Stress to the character each round if it's their fist, until they can pull it out with a successful Might task.*

`One of them, a round-faced black woman I'd later know as Sandy, squatted down next to me, and stared into my face. She made a noise of dismissal, and leaned in close to stare at me. She said, "I don't think so," and her breath hit me like a furnace. I instinctively thrust out a hand to push her away. But as I touched her face, she remained still, and instead my hand sank into it like softened candle wax.`

`—MAG 89: "Twice As Bright"`

DABBLER 5 (15)

Discovering a paranormal book or artefact or encountering an aspect of the Entities twists a normal person's life. Most are eventually consumed by their resulting fear. A handful, however, learn to defend themselves from what begins following them. What's more, they learn paranormal tricks and rituals that grant them a measure of power, often without being tied to any single Entity. Instead, they become general dabblers in the dark arts.

Artefact, page 248
The Entities, page 166

Related Entity: Any, usually three or more at the same time
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Occultism as level 6
Combat: A dabbler attacks with a ritual knife if all else fails. Otherwise, a dabbler relies on one of the following sorcerous spells.

- *Blinding the Eye:* The dabbler turns invisible until they attack. Alternately, the eyes of a target within immediate range become invisible for one minute, blinding them.
- *Buried Bunker:* Damp soil begins filling the stomach of a target in immediate range who fails a Might defense roll, dealing a serious wound as their belly begins to swell.
- *Phantom Flesh:* The dabbler manipulates an object within long range telekinetically. Offensively, they can choke a target for 3 points of Stress each round the target fails a Might defense roll.
- *Other Spells:* A dabbler may know one or more other spells gained from other dabblers, aspects, or even Avatars. For instance, one dabbler might know The Jigsaw Lady's jigsaw curse. The same or a different dabbler might know a less powerful version of The Book Collector's utter disappearance. Another might know The Tome Hoarder's spiraling confusion spell. And so on.

Interaction: Different dabblers have different goals, but almost all wish to extend their own power, even if that means participating in unsavory deeds.

Use: A dabbler, by definition, isn't usually beholden to a specific Entity, which means PCs may find it useful to interact with one. But a dabbler's goals might be almost as appalling as other threats, and a dabbler might prove a formidable recurring foe.

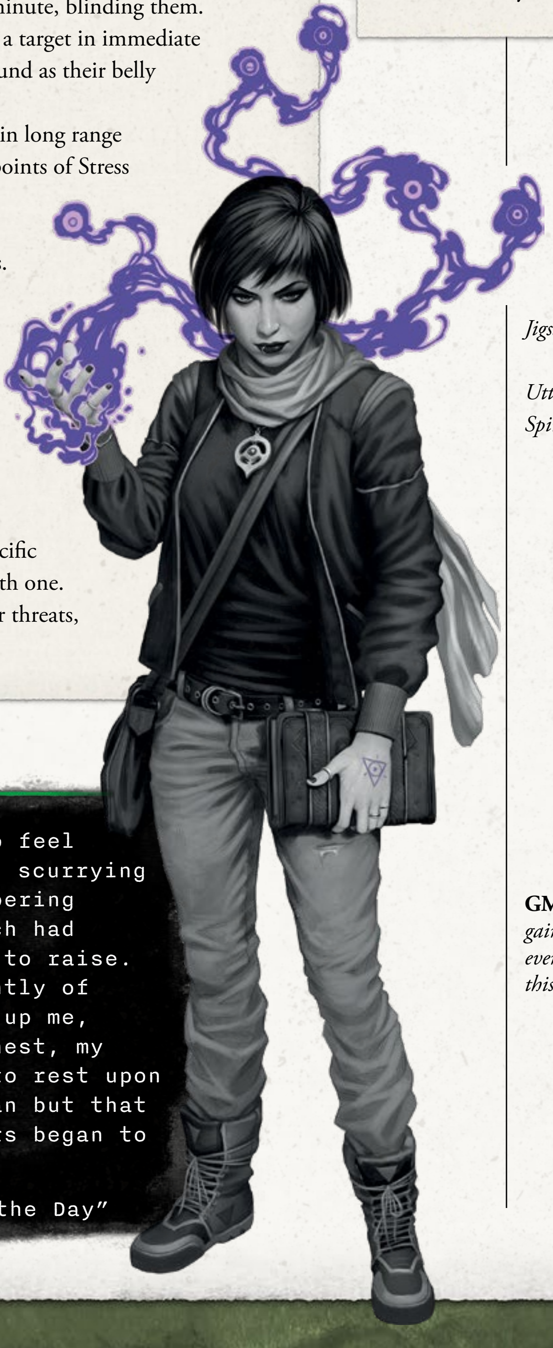
DABBLER NAMES

Dabblers usually go by their given names, such as:

William Berg, Amara Singh, Liam Chen, Ava Martinez, Mateo Ali, Mia Nguyen, Oliver Jensen, Aria Khan, Sebastian Anderson, Maya Abadi, Edward Nakamura, Peter Crowley.

Jigsaw curse, page 223

Utter disappearance, page 203
Spiraling confusion, page 240



> Her eyes locked on mine and I began to feel something. It was like a hundred tiny, scurrying legs inside my skull, moving and scampering through my mind. I felt my hands, which had dropped to the side of my body, begin to raise. They gripped my legs and then, apparently of their own accord, they began to crawl up me, climbing slowly over my stomach, my chest, my shoulders, until, finally, they came to rest upon my throat. I've never been a strong man but that didn't seem to matter as my own fingers began to close around my neck like a vice.
>
> —MAG 69: "Thought for the Day"

GM intrusion: *The dabbler gains an immediate attack, even if they've already attacked this round.*

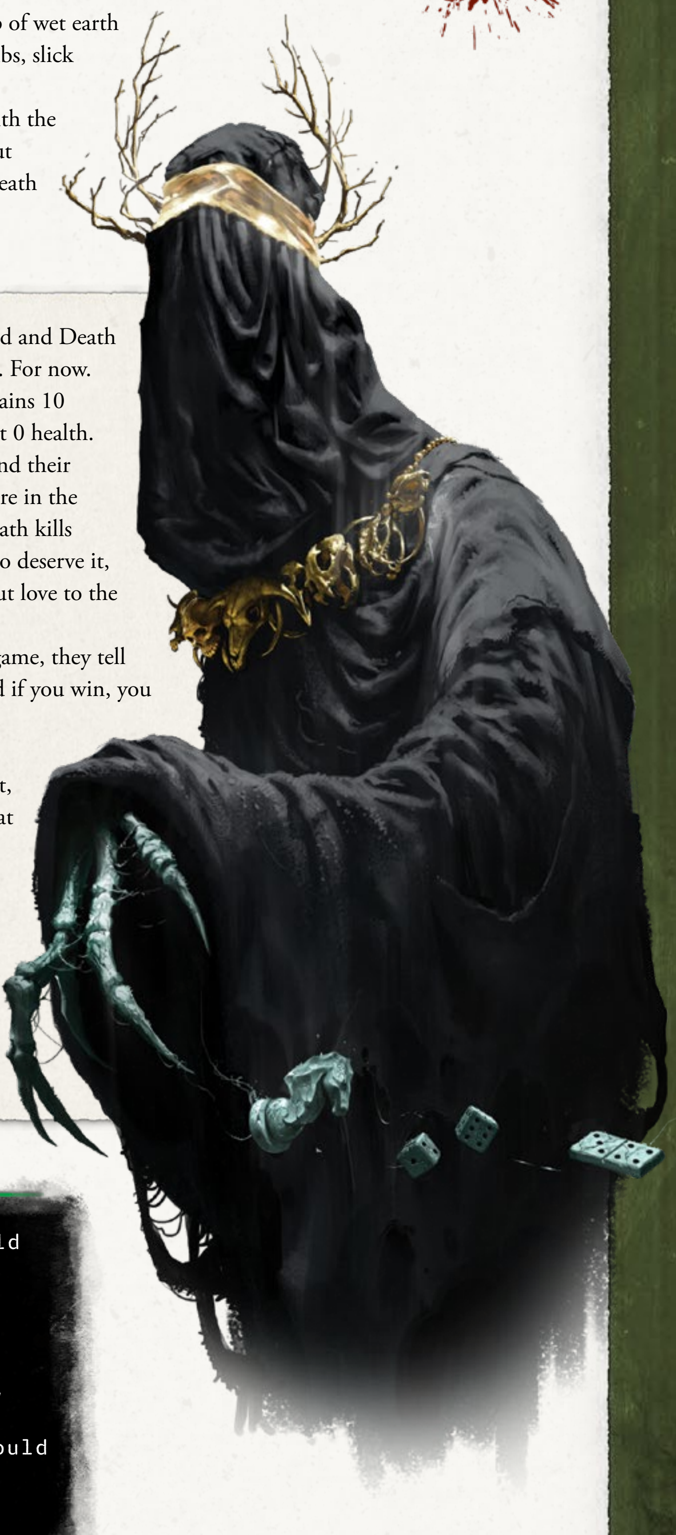
DEATH 7 (21)

GM intrusion: *Death produces exactly what's needed to play the game or enable the contest the character suggests, each item scrimshawed out of old bone.*

The End, page 172

The scent of damp heralds Death's arrival. Not the damp of wet earth after a hot day, but the cold damp of vaults and catacombs, slick with mold.

Those who regard the inevitable termination of life with the deepest panic would give almost anything to avoid it. But someone who beats one of the many embodiments of Death in a game discovers that their continued existence is as another embodiment of Death.



Related Entity: The End
Health: 33
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Games and contests of skill as level 8
Combat: Death's touch inflicts a serious injury and kills a target who fails a Might defense roll.

Death has the following abilities:

Contract With Death: Death's target may challenge Death to a game or contest before Death takes them. If Death accepts, the target and Death play a game, such as chess or farro. One method to determine how well the target plays is via a series of Intellect defense rolls (though other methods could be used to determine the winner, including actually playing the game). If the target succeeds on three defense rolls before failing three, they do not die. However, they must then succeed on a Might defense roll, or Death's mantle passes to them—they are transformed into a new embodiment of Death when the game concludes. They must now spend their undead existence introducing the living to The End until someone else beats them in a game. If the target wins and succeeds on their Might defense roll, the mantle is not transferred and Death allows them to live as they were. For now.

Deathless Existence: Death regains 10 health each round, even when at 0 health.

Deliver Death: Death can spend their action moving, flashing anywhere in the world a living target resides. Death kills people who are dying, those who deserve it, and those who bring nothing but love to the world.

Interaction: If Death agrees to a game, they tell their opponent, "Very well. And if you win, you shall not die."

Use: As an Avatar of The End, the existence of Death—and, in fact, many Deaths—is something that should give PCs serious pause. If they suspect they may soon encounter Death, they should try to avoid it or come up with a plan to fake Death out. Because normally, even those who beat Death still lose.

A Death who passes their mantle to a target regains their own flesh and, what's more, a vitality that heals them of all wounds, rendering them undying. However, food and drink sicken them, they cannot sleep, and they're haunted by a craving for something they cannot name. But a living hell is, after all, still living.

> To describe it as a skeleton would be to do Death a disservice. For though the robe that sat in that chair contained only bones, it was not the skeleton that moved. It was Death. The bones were old, so ancient and brittle that the slightest pressure or movement would have rendered them down to dust. They did move; Death was no more a skeleton than you are a woolen suit. Above all it was old. Older than you could possibly dream.
>
> —MAG 29: "Cheating Death"

DECEITFUL ARC 5 (15) 3

Arcing branches of the Twisting Deceit sometimes take individual shapes as disturbing, forking figures that crackle and fizz. Each is lit by strobing white light, as if a bolt of lightning had stepped down from the sky and assumed physical form. Their sharp smell is like just before a storm breaks.

Deceitful arcs are drawn to those afraid of storms, thunder, and especially lightning. Their flashing, malevolent presence brings the trauma of past experiences to life again in a victim's mind.

Twisting Deceit is a less common name for The Spiral (page 175).

Related Entity: The Spiral

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: Serious injury

Movement: Long

Combat: Ironically, given its form, a deceitful arc rarely initiates physical violence. Instead, it haunts those marked by the Entity over weeks, months, or even years.

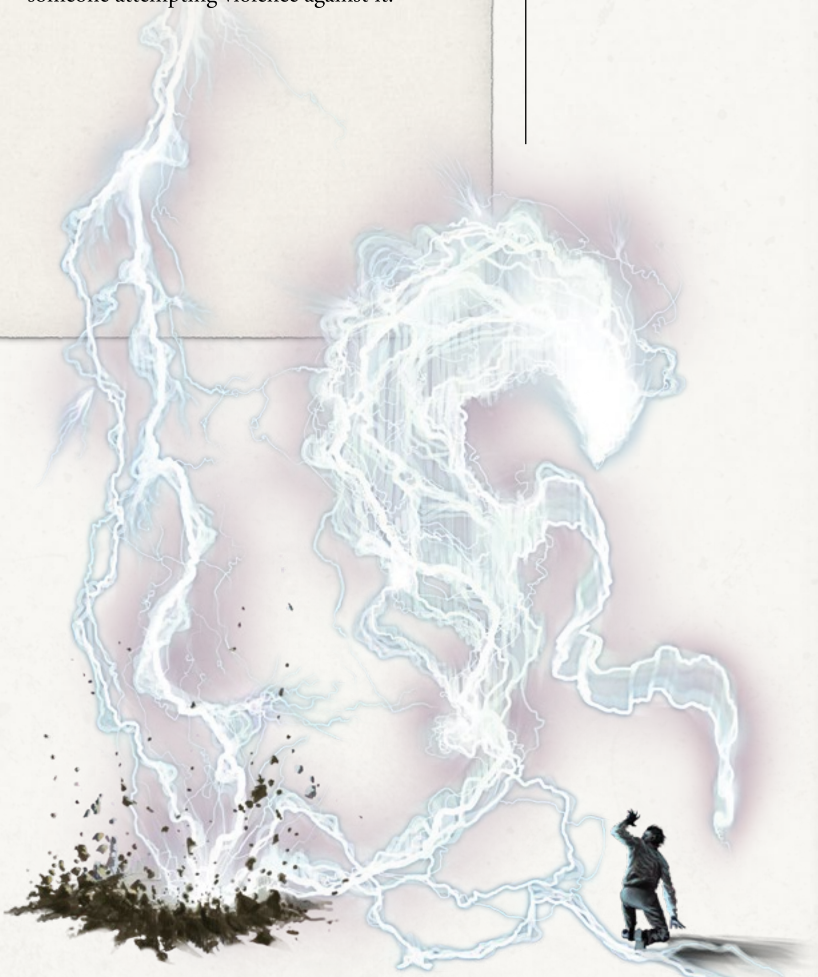
A deceitful arc has the following abilities and traits.

- *Blinding Flash:* The arc flashes lightning-bright; creatures in short range must succeed on a Might defense roll or be blinded for about a minute, or until they succeed on a Might defense roll on their turn.
- *Dread the Storm:* A target within short range must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or be overcome with a vision of shifting, branching avenues of light that lasts one minute. The affected target gains 2 points of Stress and is effectively helpless as they imagine traveling the branches so fast that their flesh peels away, leaving nothing but coursing, buzzing pain as they ache for an end to the corridors they know aren't there. An affected target that succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on their turn ends the vision early.
- *Live Electricity:* If the deceitful arc is touched, or if it resorts to violence and rakes a target with claws of pure lightning, the target suffers a serious injury from electricity and, on a failed Might defense roll, is stunned, losing their next turn.

Interaction: A deceitful arc doesn't speak, but, if injured, it groans with a sound like tearing sandpaper.

Use: Deceitful arcs prefer to haunt a particular target over long periods, usually without becoming physically dangerous. Thus even a single PC could survive multiple encounters with one, assuming the arc is not provoked by someone attempting violence against it.

GM intrusion: *A character hit by the arc's electrical attack develops a series of scars resembling a Lichtenberg figure. Lichtenberg figures are intricate, branching, fractal patterns.*



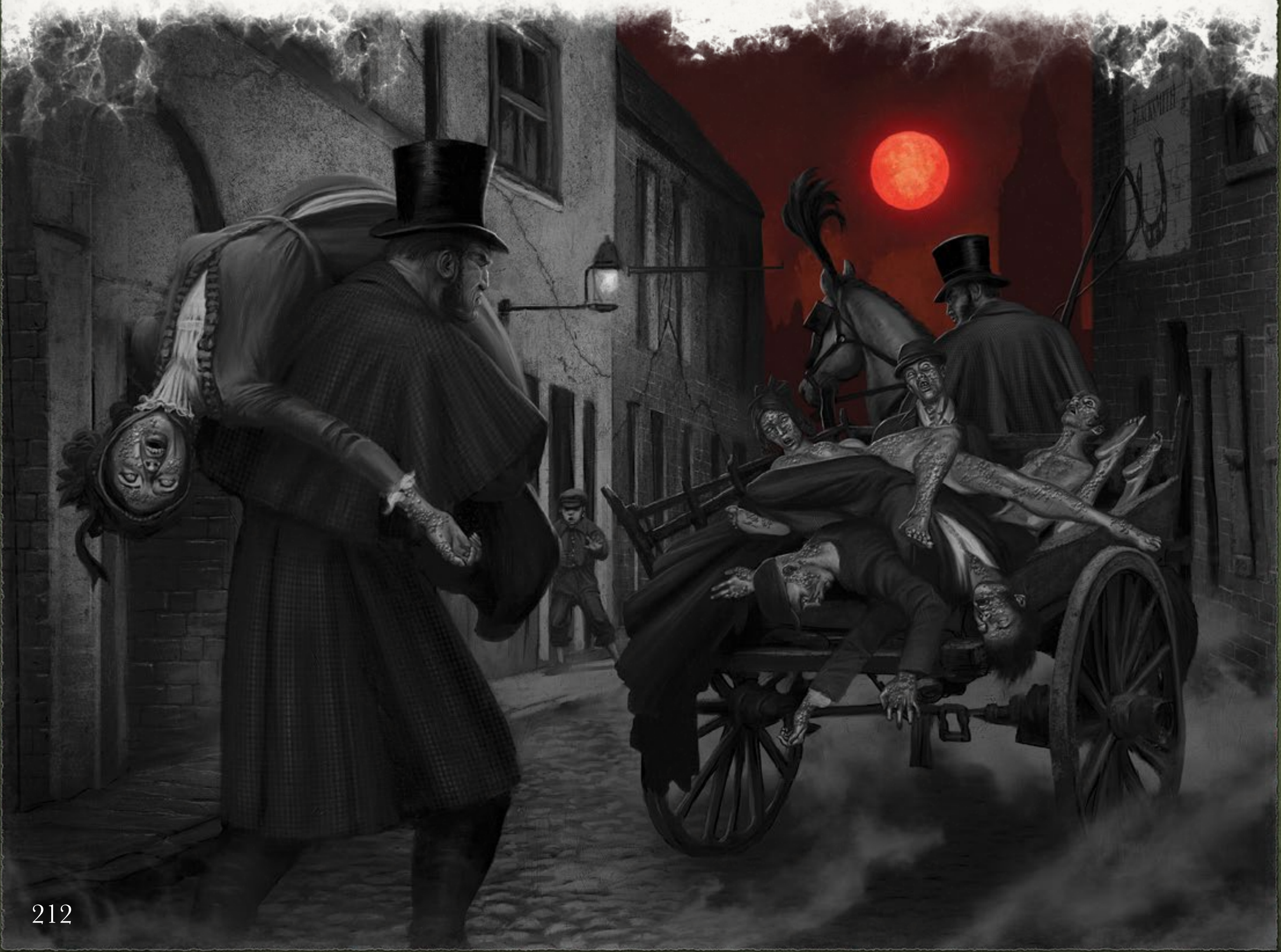
> It delighted in toying with my perceptions, making me believe a storm was approaching, forcing me to run for shelter or desperately hunt for cover without warning. In the dark it would stand beneath my bedroom window, the light flaring, flashing the awful brightness of sheet lightning across my room.
>
> I could never look directly at it. The bright, arcing glow of its insides almost blinded me when I tried. It was almost a man, but I could never be sure. Its strobing, flashing Lichtenberg organs changed and flickered too fast.
>
> —MAG 91: "The Coming Storm"

THE DELIVERYMEN 5 (15)

A grimy white van pulls up. Two tall, hard-faced men exit, open up the back, and make their delivery. The object delivered usually turns out to be something the client would've lived longer, and in less fear, without.

The Deliverymen's names in The Magnus Archives *podcast are Breekon & Hope.*

> They were innocuous at first; the right things delivered to the right people on time. Then it became the right things delivered to the wrong people. Then the wrong things being delivered.
>
> Then the very wrong things. Strange folk began coming around asking for Breekon & Hope, and when I told them who I was, they just shook their heads, and I knew who they were after.
>
> They often brought crates or boxes with them and, once, a sack full of hair.
>
> —MAG 96: "Return to Sender"



Related Entity: The Deliverymen have served many Entities over several centuries, most recently The Stranger.

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: Serious injury

Movement: Short

Modifications: Tasks involving strength as level 7

Combat: The Deliverymen attack with a handy tire iron, a fire axe, or a two-handed punch as solid as a baseball bat.

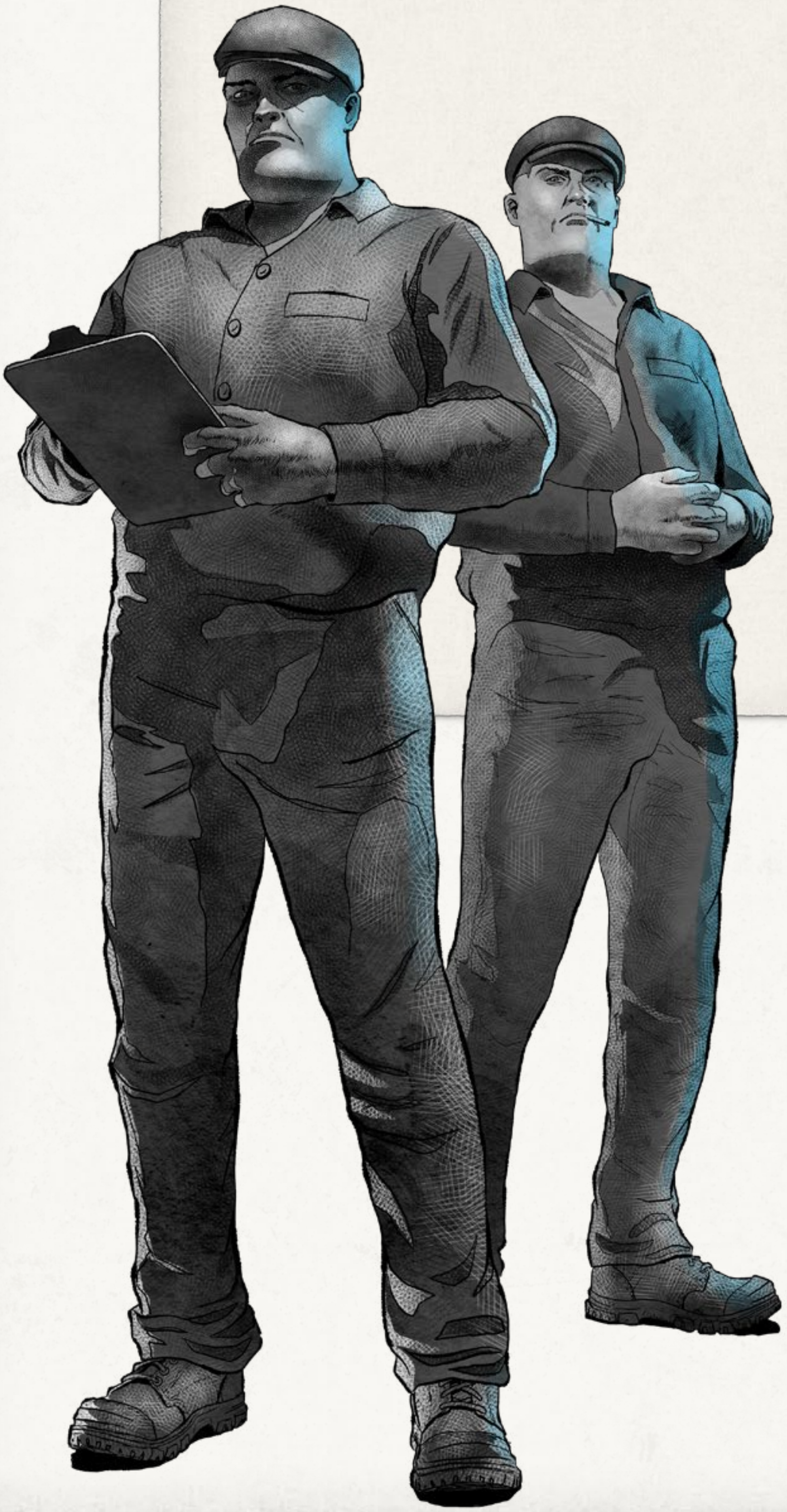
The Deliverymen also have the following traits.

- *Feeling No Pain:* They can't be dazed or stunned by physical attacks and are immune to all poisons and diseases.
- *Hard to Drop:* If an attack would reduce either of The Deliverymen's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, they are reduced to 1 point of health instead.
- *Working Together:* One of the two takes the lead in a given encounter. The other aids, providing one asset each round for their partner, whether that's for intimidation, defense, or distracting a foe so their partner is more likely to strike a target.

Interaction: The Deliverymen speak either English or Russian, using an exaggerated Cockney or cartoonish rural accent, respectively. They haven't always been deliverymen or even always gone by their current assumed names, but they've always relished the fear that their presence, actions, and deliveries inspire.

Use: The Deliverymen are terrifying but not invincible. That said, the GM might prefer to have them be an ongoing, veiled threat throughout the campaign rather than a direct one.

The Deliverymen are rarely far from their van. Someone looking about in the various crates and boxes in the back of their van might discover the remains of a kidnap victim from months earlier, or perhaps a dangerous artefact on its way to someone new, such as the coffin of The Buried, the web table, one of Leitner's books, or something else.



The Stranger, page 175

Coffin of The Buried, page 254

Web table, page 264

Leitners, page 267

GM intrusion: *The character is picked up and held helpless until they can escape with a Might roll as their action, or the character is dropped into the back of the van or other nearby open object.*

DISCIPLE OF THE ENDLESS 6 (18)

His eyes seem to open onto an incomprehensible, infinite space. Dizziness washes over those who look at them, their stomachs drop like they're falling, and their breath comes short and shallow.

Disciples of the Endless wander the world, feasting on the fear others have of falling, of bottomless oceans, of open spaces, and of being insignificant in a universe vast beyond understanding.

The two Disciples of the Endless featured in The Magnus Archives *podcast are Michael Crew and Simon Fairchild.*

Simon Fairchild is a tiny pink skeleton of a man who walks with a cane he doesn't need. He prefers inducing the fear of unknown watery depths.

> Then I saw it. It was only a shadow in the dark, but it was there and it was huge. It stretched from one side of my vision to the other and, as I fought against the pressure to turn my aching head, I still couldn't see the end of it, only its blurred outline was slightly better contrasted against the lighter shade of the twilight water that surrounded it. I could not see the ends of it. It was so big it made me lightheaded to think about it, to try and place myself in some believable scale against it. I think it was a hand, but I could not see enough to be sure. Then it moved, slowly but clearly, and I realized how far away it still was, as it got bigger and bigger and bigger and I could see nothing else and I screamed.
>
> —MAG 51: "High Pressure"

Related Entity: The Vast
Health: 24
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short; flies and swims a long distance each round
Combat: The Disciple of the Endless rarely resorts to physical violence, instead using his paranormal abilities.

✦ *Agoraphaura:* Anyone within short range of the Disciple who looks at him feels a sensation of falling or drowning (his choice), hindering all tasks directly associated with the Disciple. Looking away eliminates the sensation and hindrance, but not looking at him likely has other costs.

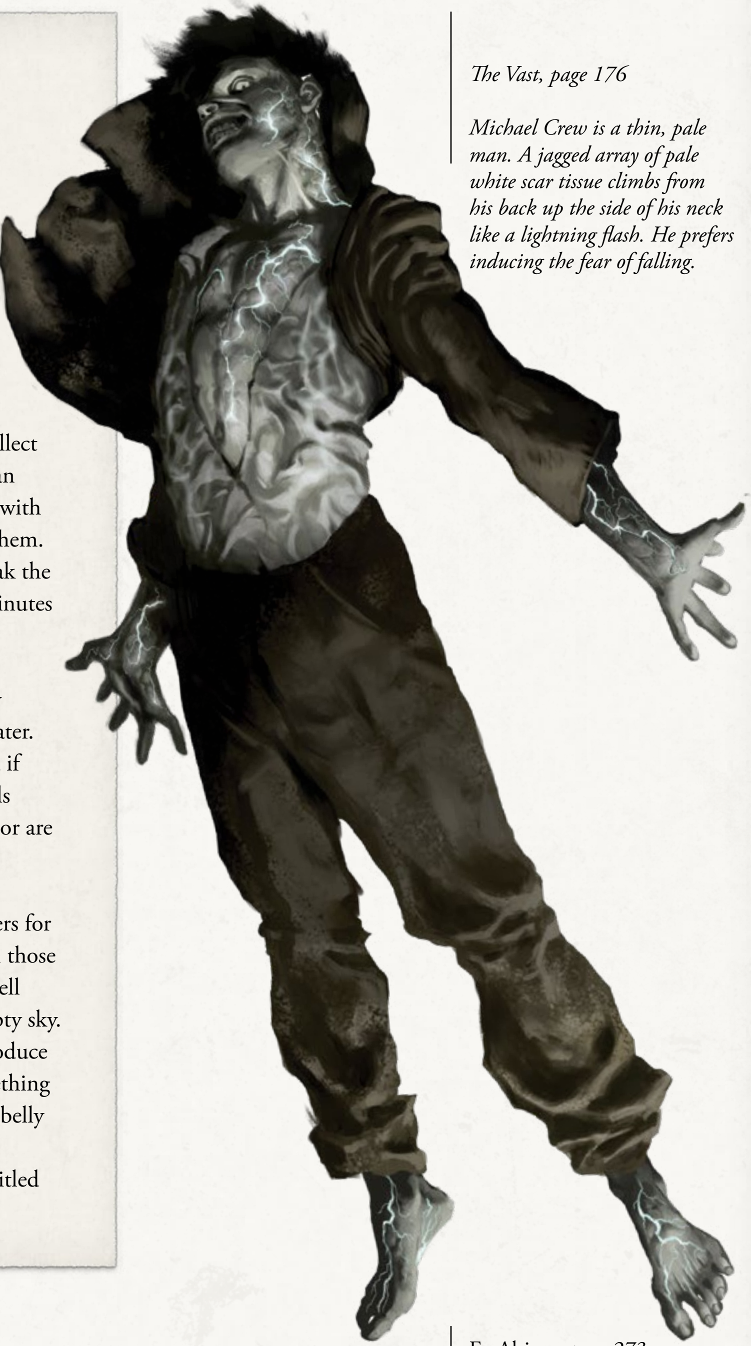
✦ *Feel the Fall:* The Disciple attacks a target in long range merely by concentrating on them as his action. On a failed Intellect defense roll, the target hallucinates that they're falling through an endless and bright blue expanse (or are deep beneath the ocean with no surface or floor) for one hour, or until the Disciple releases them. A target can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to break the hallucination; otherwise they gain 1 point of Stress every ten minutes and are effectively helpless.

✦ *Into The Vast:* Instead of a target hallucinating a fall as just described, an affected target physically falls into a bright, empty blue sky that goes on forever, or an endless expanse of empty water. The target can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round, and if they succeed on three, they return to the world. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they fall forever (or are crushed by water pressure).

Interaction: Like many Avatars in recognizable human form, the Disciple of the Endless may form short-term alliances with others for his own benefit. But he's also part of The Vast and must feed on those who have a special fear of falling or open spaces. He may even tell them "Enjoy sky blue" before sending them into The Vast's empty sky.

Use: A minor encounter with a Disciple of the Endless could introduce a character to The Vast, as long as the character doesn't do something to provoke the Disciple into physically dropping them into the belly of his Entity.

The Disciple may possess or know where to obtain the rare book titled *Ex Altiora*.



The Vast, page 176

Michael Crew is a thin, pale man. A jagged array of pale white scar tissue climbs from his back up the side of his neck like a lightning flash. He prefers inducing the fear of falling.

Ex Altiora, *page 273*

GM intrusion: *The sky itself—the whole sky, as far as the horizon—twists around and moves like shifting sand and takes a bite from the character who fails a Speed defense roll, inflicting a serious injury on a hit.*

> He knew something was wrong almost immediately. He was jumping, he said, from about ten thousand feet, so should have been falling for almost thirty seconds before opening his parachute, but he was having trouble keeping count. The clear blue sky was so bright it seemed to blind him, and the numbers were all jumbled in his head. His balance seemed to be all turned around and he said he had had to shut his eyes tight against the brightness, concentrating to keep his count. Finally, he reached what he thought was thirty seconds, and went to pull his ripcord, but as he did, he said, he opened his eyes again and froze. The ground was gone.
>
> —MAG 21: "Freefall"

THE DISTORTION 6 (18)

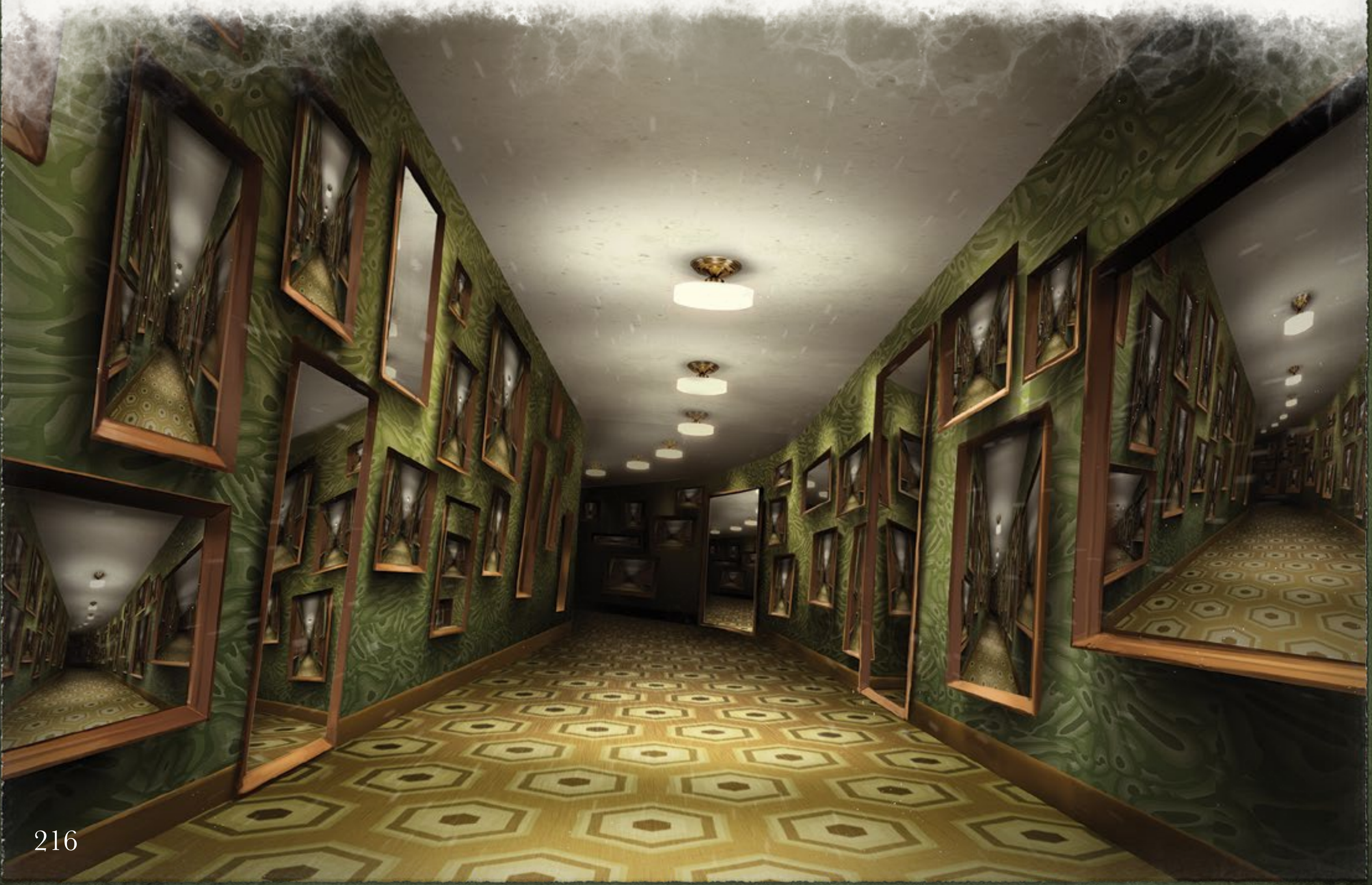
The small, unremarkable door—painted dark yellow with a matte black handle—wasn't there before. Its mere appearance invites exploration. Or perhaps the door opens and the door attendant asks if you'd like to come in.

Inside is a windowless corridor lit by wall lamps. A swirling green pattern papers the walls. A thick black rug runs down the center of the faded yellow carpet. Mirrors and paintings dot the walls. The paintings depict the same corridor from odd angles.

The Distortion is the door, the door attendant, and most importantly, the mess of impossible intersecting corridors within that slowly bend left, with occasional sharp branches to the right. Those lured in soon discover the colors and decorations are inconstant and that it's next to impossible to escape the ever-changing maze, unless The Distortion allows it. But why would it?

The Distortion's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Helen Richardson.*

> Here's the thing: I don't remember going through that door. I remember standing there, looking down it with this feeling of dread and then I remember feeling a surge of terror as I heard the door close behind me with a click. I spun round, but there was no handle on this side, just a huge, smooth mirror. I saw myself stood in that strange corridor and it looked like I'd been crying for hours. I hammered, shouted, I threw myself against that uncaring face of that mirror, but nothing happened. It didn't even crack.
>
> —MAG 47: "The New Door"



Related Entity: The Spiral
Health: 24
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Persuasion and deception as level 8
Combat: The Distortion doesn't usually attack physically, and then only when it manifests in human guise, its fist as heavy as a wet leather bag full of sharp stones.

The Distortion also has the following abilities.

Doors: The Distortion can access most locations it knows about, or a place where someone it seeks is located, by causing one of its doors to appear there as its action. The Distortion can manifest up to fifteen doors at one time but could choose to have less or none. All the doors lead to its Spiraling Maze.

Manifestation: The Distortion can manifest its human form from any door or branching corridor as its action. Once manifest, it can escape unwelcome scrutiny by ducking into one of its doors or into a mirror inside its maze.

Spiraling Maze: Charting a way through The Distortion's maze is nearly impossible, unless it decides to help a traveler through. Without its assistance, those seeking to escape can attempt a difficulty 8 Intellect roll each minute. If they succeed, they find a door or break a mirror that leads out. Otherwise, they gain 1 point of Stress.

A handful of past victims are also imprisoned in its maze. Some are agents of other Entities.

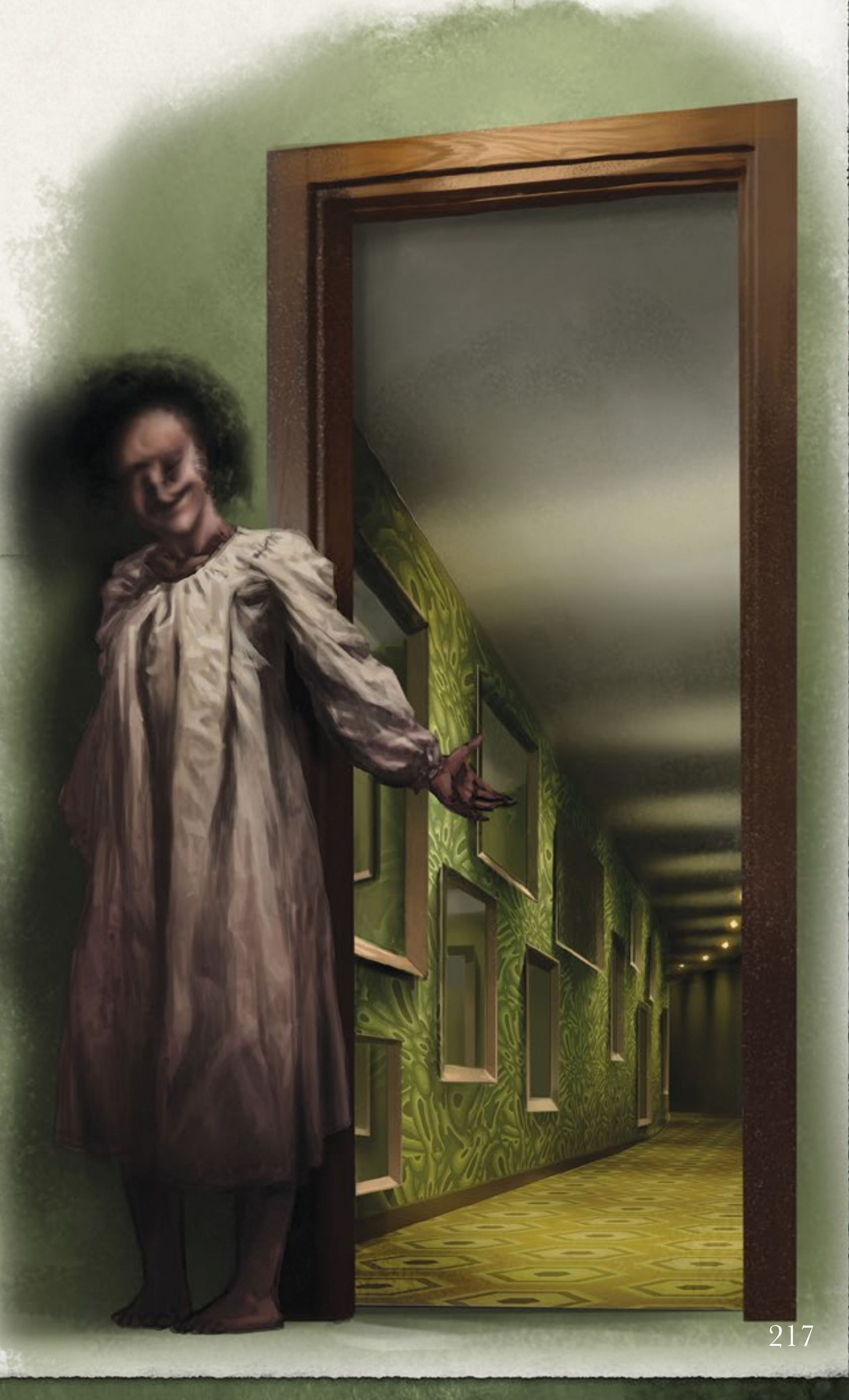
Interaction: The Distortion may offer aid or ask for help, though typically only to gaslight a target into mistrusting their judgments about others, the world, or their own mind. Usually it just takes new victims into itself and slowly feeds on their fear as they grow more and more lost in its mazed corridors.

Use: The Distortion could provide actual, legitimate aid to PCs who are fighting Avatars or aspects of Entities other than The Spiral. However, PCs should come to realize that every interaction with it poses a grave risk.

The Spiral, page 175

GM intrusion: *A door opens beneath the character's feet, and they must succeed on a Speed defense roll to avoid falling into the Spiraling Maze.*

```
It looked too tall, the limbs and
body were very thin and almost
wavy, like they didn't have any
structure or bones in them. I
couldn't make out a face, but
it was the hands that were the
most bizarre. They seemed to be
stretched and inflated by the
distorted light, until they were
almost the size of the rest of
the torso. The fingers were long
and stiff, and seemed to end in
sharp points. It stood completely
motionless, and I could feel it
staring at me.

          —MAG 26: "A Distortion"
```



THE FLESH HIVE 6 (18) 3

The Flesh Hive corrupts people, making worm colonies of them while feeding on their fear.

Related Entity: The Corruption
Health: 23
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Combat: The Flesh Hive coughs up a silver worm—which emerges with the sound of ripping meat—at a target within immediate range, dealing a serious injury if it hits.

The Flesh Hive also has the following traits.

Burrowing Worms: A target bitten by one or more worms must spend the next round succeeding on a difficulty 3 Speed-based task to remove the worm(s). If they (and/or an ally) fail, the worm slips inside and the target is infested as a level 5 disease requiring three successful Might defense rolls (one per day) to clear. Each failed Might defense roll causes the target to descend one step on the damage track. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they become a colony (a minor Flesh Hive) under The Corruption's control.

Worm Cascade: The Flesh Hive releases all her worms (no more than once each hour), which swarm in a short range for one round. Anything in the area is attacked, gaining 3 points of Stress on a hit. Hit targets are also subject to Burrowing Worms.

Interaction: The Flesh Hive is opposed to The Eye (and other Entities that seem ascendant), and when she encounters their servants, she seeks to corrupt and destroy them, potentially making short-term alliances to this end.

Use: One of the many true horrors afflicting the world, The Flesh Hive's proximity is potentially first revealed by the appearance of silver worms and/or colonies. If The Flesh Hive itself is found (or if she finds the characters), the PCs' best hope is to flee and regroup.

The Corruption, page 170

Silver worm, page 237

The Eye, page 172

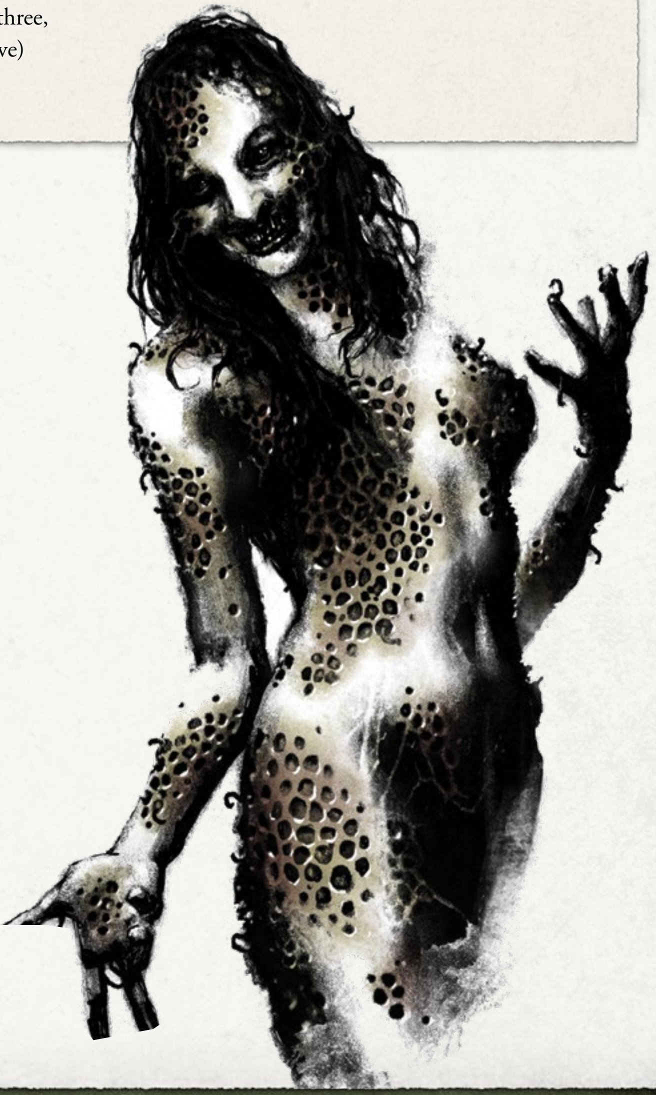
Most worms released by The Flesh Hive shrivel, but a few scurry into the shadows and wait, becoming future silver worm threats.

GM intrusion: *The character feels an itch, looks down, and sees the tail end of a silver worm slipping into their body.*

Colony: *level 2; releases a level 3 worm swarm attacking everything in short range for one round, destroying the colony; hit targets are also subject to Burrowing Worms*

The Flesh Hive's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Jane Prentiss.*

> Her pupils seemed ragged and collapsed, and when she smiled her teeth were chipped and blackened. I started to stagger backwards, expecting at any moment for her to lunge at me, but instead she slowly reached up and . . . let the overcoat fall to the floor. Her skin was pale, almost grey, and full of . . . sorry, it still makes me sick to think about it. It was full of holes. Deep, black holes just honeycombing every bit of flesh like a . . . wasps' nest. I could see those . . . thin, silver worms crawling in and out, and their black tips twitching as they squirmed through that . . . pitted . . . meat. I mean, it wasn't human. It can't have been.
>
> Sh-She . . . It took a step towards me and as it did so the worms began to writhe out of every hole and cavity, falling to the floor in a cascading . . . wave and starting to crawl towards me with . . . with alarming speed.
>
> —MAG 22: "Colony"



THE FRIENDLESS 6 (18)

Pale to the point of resembling white porcelain, The Friendless is dedicated to cultivating loneliness in other people and the world at large. He seeks to shatter bonds of community, of connectedness and friendship, and all the things that usually make life rich. His victims are mostly those who are already inward-looking, or whose circumstances have forced them to be apart from others.

Related Entity: The Lonely
Health: 25
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Modifications: Stealth as level 9; persuasion as level 7
Combat: The Friendless usually uses his paranormal abilities and traits in combat, as follows.

Go Away: The Friendless focuses his attention on a target within short range. The target is banished into an isolated dimensional layer of The Lonely on a failed Intellect defense roll (accompanied by a sharp, shrill, and staticky popping sound). Though the layer mirrors the real world in some respects, it is cold, empty, and given to obscuring fog, flooding, or endless tracts of suburban development. It's usually empty of other people, even others who were banished into it. Trapped targets take 1 point of Stress each hour they fail an Intellect defense roll. Trapped targets can attempt an Intellect-based task each minute they spend searching for a way out. On a success, they appear within a few yards to a few miles of where they were disappeared by The Friendless.

Travel The Lonely: The Friendless can access The Lonely as his action, and it holds no dangers for him. He can leave at any time, appearing back in the real world at a location he knows about or finds while exploring the mirror realm for several hours.

Interaction: The Friendless finds it intoxicating to send others into The Lonely. But he is willing to cooperate with others to keep the influence of Entities other than his own at bay. Sometimes his fondness for wagering can be used to convince him to work with others, though he rarely misses an opportunity to extol the beauty of loneliness.

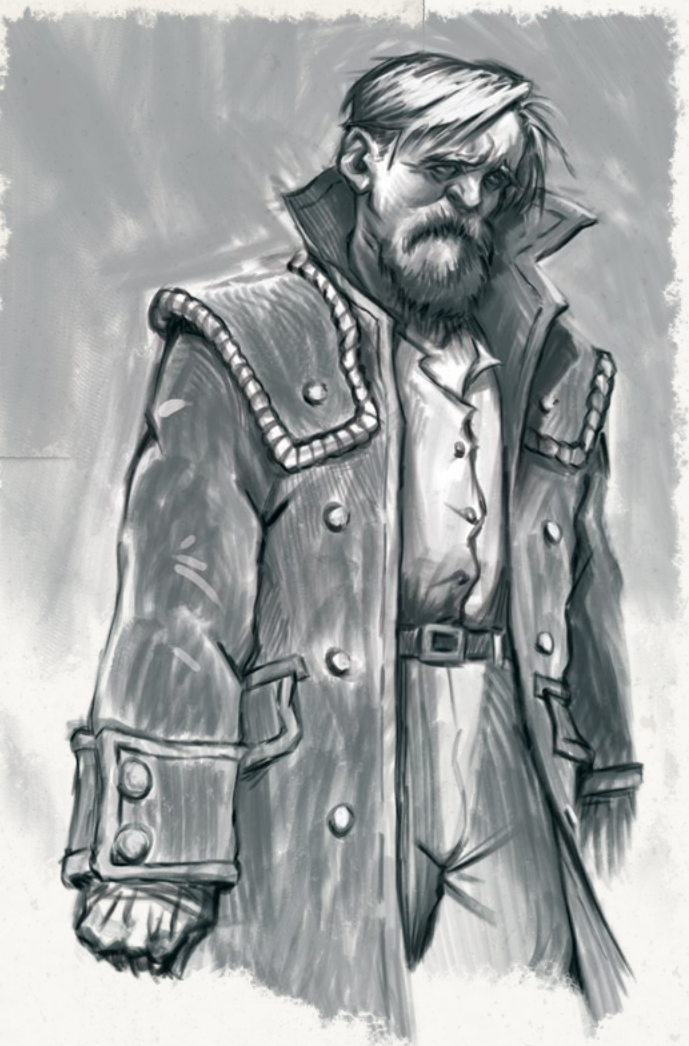
Use: PCs working alone have the most to fear from The Friendless because he uses their circumstances against them, either directly disappearing them or trying to persuade them to isolate themselves from their allies.

The Friendless's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Peter Lukas.*

The Lonely, page 174

GM intrusion: *The character realizes they've somehow lost some time, wandered off from their friends, and are alone in a place they don't recognize. (It's not the dimension of The Lonely.) Their friends apparently didn't notice either, at least not until now.*

> I would walk around the darkened streets, drinking in the sodium orange, looking at the lit windows of the tower blocks that surrounded me, each one a small cosy den of warmth and humanity, and reveling in my distance from them. Sometimes I would pass another late night traveler on the street and I would *hate* them. They shattered the distance, my cocoon of quiet stillness, and I wished with all my heart that they would simply disappear. And one day, one of them did.
>
> —MAG 159: "The Last Transcript"



GREYLING 3 (9)

2

The Vast, page 176

GM intrusion: *The greyling grabbing the character flies straight up into the air, bringing the character with them.*

Disciple of the Endless, page 214

Aspects of The Vast, greylings are utterly horrific and have inhumanly long arms and legs, though their full bulk is often hidden by thick fog. No two look exactly alike, but all delight in pushing, pulling, or otherwise plunging victims to their death.

Greylings haunt high places where humans venture.Sometimes they are specifically called by other agents of The Vast, such as a Disciple of the Endless.

Related Entity: The Vast
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short; long when flying
Combat: A greyling batters with its long, grey, and completely inhuman arms.

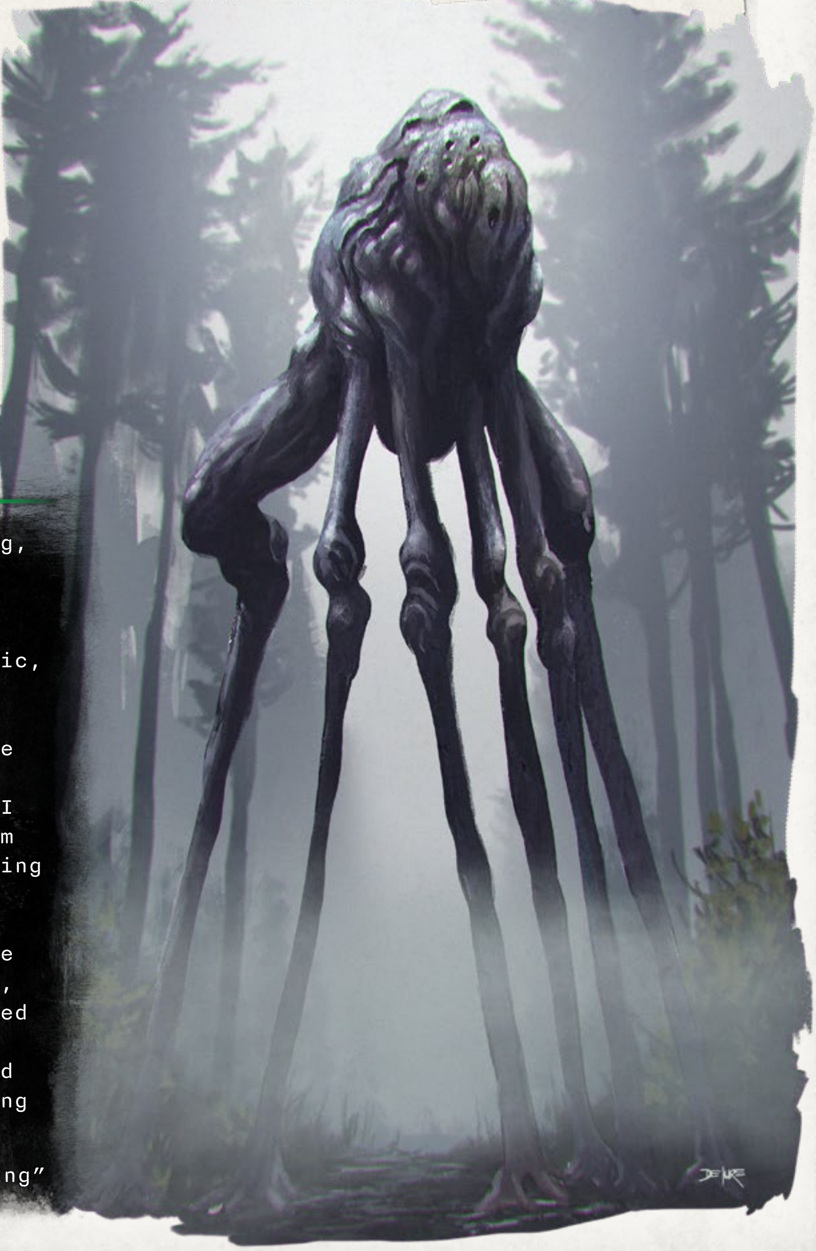
Greylings also have the following traits and abilities.

Fog: The greyling summons misty fog filling a very long area (up to once a day). The fog persists for up to ten minutes, making ranged attacks in the area nearly impossible and hindering melee attacks, easing the greyling's stealth tasks by three steps.

Over the Edge: A target damaged by the greyling must also succeed on a Might defense roll, or the greyling grabs them. A grabbed target's physical actions are hindered and they automatically take damage each round until they can escape with a successful Might roll as their action, or until the greyling—as its next action—pushes or pulls the target over a nearby lip leading to a long drop. Resisting being forced over the edge also requires a successful Might defense roll.

Interaction: Greylings are vicious aspects of The Vast that have no purpose other than terrorizing those afraid of falling.

Use: Greylings are not especially dangerous on their own, but if they appear in numbers and/or in locations where one wrong step (or shove) could lead to a deadly fall, the danger they pose to an otherwise competent team of characters is increased.



> Sure enough, as he approached the opening, his hand just starting to reach out into the mist, I heard something on the cable that stretched out behind us. I didn't turn around, but I could hear the rhythmic, scraping sounds of something crawling rapidly towards us. I saw Mum's eyes focus on something behind my head and she screamed. It was a sound I'd never heard her make in my whole life, and one that I will never forget. There was a thump from above, the sound of something heavy landing on the roof of the car, and the driver froze, arm still outstretched. His eyes widened in sudden realisation, but before he could pull back from the edge, an arm, long, grey and completely inhuman, reached down from above with terrible speed. It grabbed his wrist, just for a moment, and then he was gone, his own scream vanishing into the abyss beyond the door.
>
> —MAG 124: "Left Hanging"

GRINNING WHEEL 4 (12)

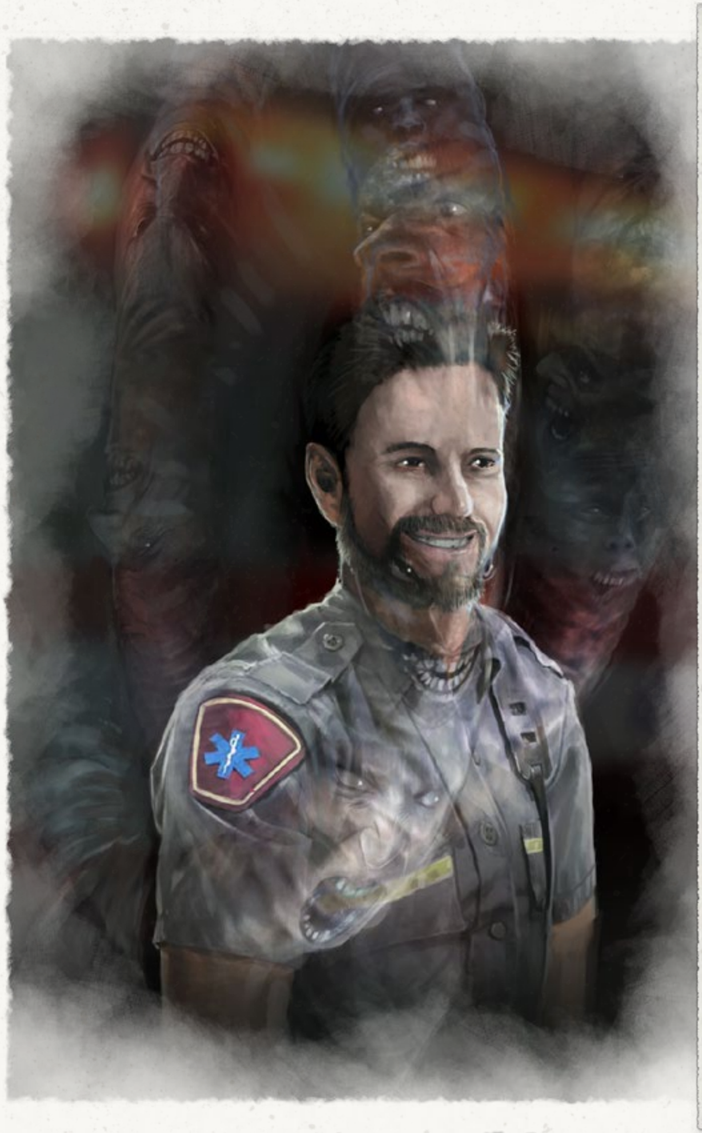
2

Lurking in plain sight, a grinning wheel seems like an ordinary person offering aid with a friendly smile. They might appear as a helpful person on the street, an eager salesperson, or a repair person showing up to fix a leaky faucet or other issue. Those who accept a grinning wheel's aid soon realize something's not right with their helper's face; it keeps changing, as if revolving through a series of features fixed to some half-visible series of wheels within wheels.

Should a victim be unlucky enough to see through the guise of normality, they realize the "wheels" are wormlike creatures studded with gnashing mouths and stolen faces.

The Stranger, page 175

The Hunt, page 173



Related Entity: The Stranger and The Hunt

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: Serious injury

Movement: Short

Modifications: Tasks to recall original victim's life as level 2; disguise (as past victim) as level 5

Combat: A grinning wheel relies on its paranormal abilities and traits in combat.

Another Face: The grinning wheel changes faces, one seeming to slide away as another slithers over and settles into the same spot. Targets witnessing this for the first time gain 2 points of Stress on a failed Intellect defense roll.

Reveal the Wheel: The creature's true, horrific, wheel-like form becomes plain to all as it tries to rip a target's face off with its slavering mouths. Anyone witnessing this for the first time gains 2 points of Stress on a failed Intellect defense roll. In addition, the target must succeed on a Speed defense roll or suffer a serious injury. A target killed by this attack has their face added to the grinning wheel's repertoire.

Stranger in Charge: If the grinning wheel locks gazes with a target as their action, the target must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or act as the grinning wheel desires for the next minute, or until the affected target succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on a subsequent turn. That action might be to follow the grinning wheel, attack an ally, or begin removing their own face (inflicting 3 points of Stress and releasing the target from the control).

Interaction: Grinning wheels are aspects of both The Stranger and The Hunt and have little in the way of personality, but they may try to emulate an ordinary person from memories remaining from past victims to improve their chances.

Use: A group of PCs can overcome a grinning wheel without too much immediate risk; however, an individual PC may be targeted by one that has a face of someone the character used to know, and wronged.

> When she first joined the Archives, she took the place of a man named Angus Stacey, whose face was torn from his skull by a creature of masks and smiles. Gertrude had thought of it as "The Grinning Wheel," and it was one of the first things to fall at the hands of the Institute's new avenger. Appropriately enough, Gertrude used fire.
>
> —MAG 167: "Curiosity"

GM intrusion: *The new face on the grinning wheel is of someone the character knows; the character suffers 2 Stress from this realization.*

THE HUNTER 6 (18) 2

The Hunt, page 173

The Hunter stalks potential prey like a ravenous wolf. The only difference is a wolf's skin is hairy on the outside; The Hunter is that way on the inside. But The Hunter wants their prey to know that, soon enough, they will be quarry, chased down like a rabbit in the fields. Not quickly, though; the meat tastes best after marinating in stark fear for hours.

Related Entity: The Hunt
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Long
Modifications: Perception, tracking, and stealth as level 7
Combat: The Hunter claws.

The Hunter also has the following traits.

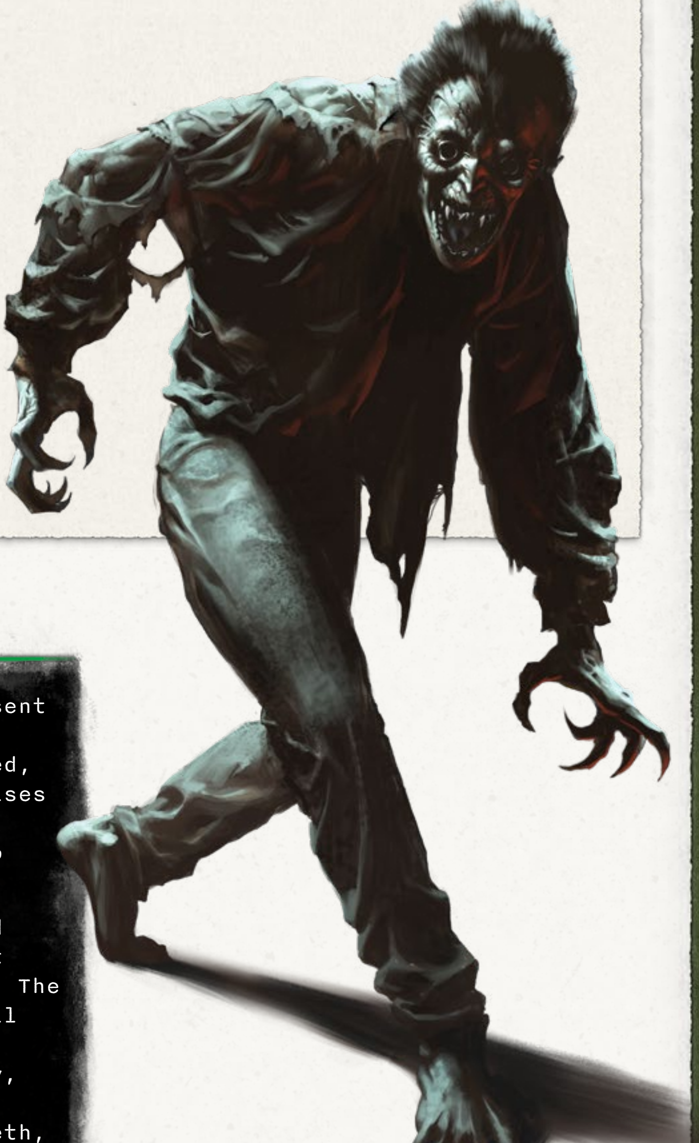
Avatar Bane: Avatars damaged by The Hunter can't supernaturally heal themselves of that damage and, if destroyed by The Hunter, can't return to life.

Terrifying Song: Once per day, The Hunter sings their favorite tune: "A-Hunting We Shall Go" floats on the air. Everyone in long range who hears the song and fails an Intellect defense roll is terrified, freezing in place or running away as fast as they can (The Hunter's choice) for one minute. A terrified target can attempt an Intellect defense roll to end the effect each round. Each failed attempt (or failure to try) inflicts 1 point of Stress.

Unstoppable Hunter: The Hunter regains 2 points of health per round, even when at 0 health.

Interaction: The Hunter at first appears as a regular hiker in sturdy, rugged clothes, sans coat or pack. They ask what the target's immediate plans are, their smile seeming to have too many teeth. If The Hunter decides to pursue, they sniff their new prey, say something like, "Tomorrow will be a good day for a run," and head off. If the potential prey remains anywhere in the area, The Hunter stalks them for one day, adding to the target's apprehension by voicing a slow, soft laugh sometime before finally catching up.

Use: The Hunter could be briefly halted by a group of especially physically gifted PCs. However, The Hunter's unstoppable nature means that the PCs' best chance for surviving is evading or fleeing the area entirely.



GM intrusion: *The Hunter runs across an unlikely distance with an incredible burst of speed and attacks the character as part of the same action.*

`The wretched thing had just sent me in a circle. For fun. For the chase. I was tired, scared, covered in scratches and bruises over my entire body, and for nothing. I was still going to die.`

`I turned to face my fate, and for the first time that night got a good look at my hunter. The moonlight shone on him in full and what I saw was not human. It's hard to describe exactly, but everything about him was sharper. His fingers, his teeth, his face, his eyes. His skin.`

`—MAG 31: "First Hunt"`

THE JIGSAW LADY 6 (18)

The Jigsaw Lady—despite her advanced age, round face, and lilac dressing gown—is a contract killer. Her well-kept suburban home is decorated with framed jigsaw puzzles, with more around the house half-finished. When she matter-of-factly asks who you want dead, it's over a cup of coffee. All she needs to complete the contract is an object taken from the selected victim. When you hand it over, she rewards you with a warm smile.

The victim soon begins losing body parts: a finger here, a couple of toes there, some teeth, an eye . . . Each time, the loss is preceded by the delivery of a parcel wrapped in brown paper and string. Inside, a smaller black cardboard box holds a severed body part—the very one the victim soon loses, as if by accident. The wound immediately closes, healed up as if the severing happened years ago.

The process ends when nothing of the victim remains; some hungers are too strong to be denied.

The Jigsaw Lady's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Angela.*

GM intrusion: *The character receives a box wrapped in brown paper with their name printed on it, along with the words FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION.*

The Flesh, page 173

Related Entity: The Flesh
Health: 18
Damage Inflicted: 1 point of Stress
Movement: Short
Modifications: Speed defense and attacks as level 2
Combat: The Jigsaw Lady isn't much for direct physical attacks, but her sorcerous defenses are potent.

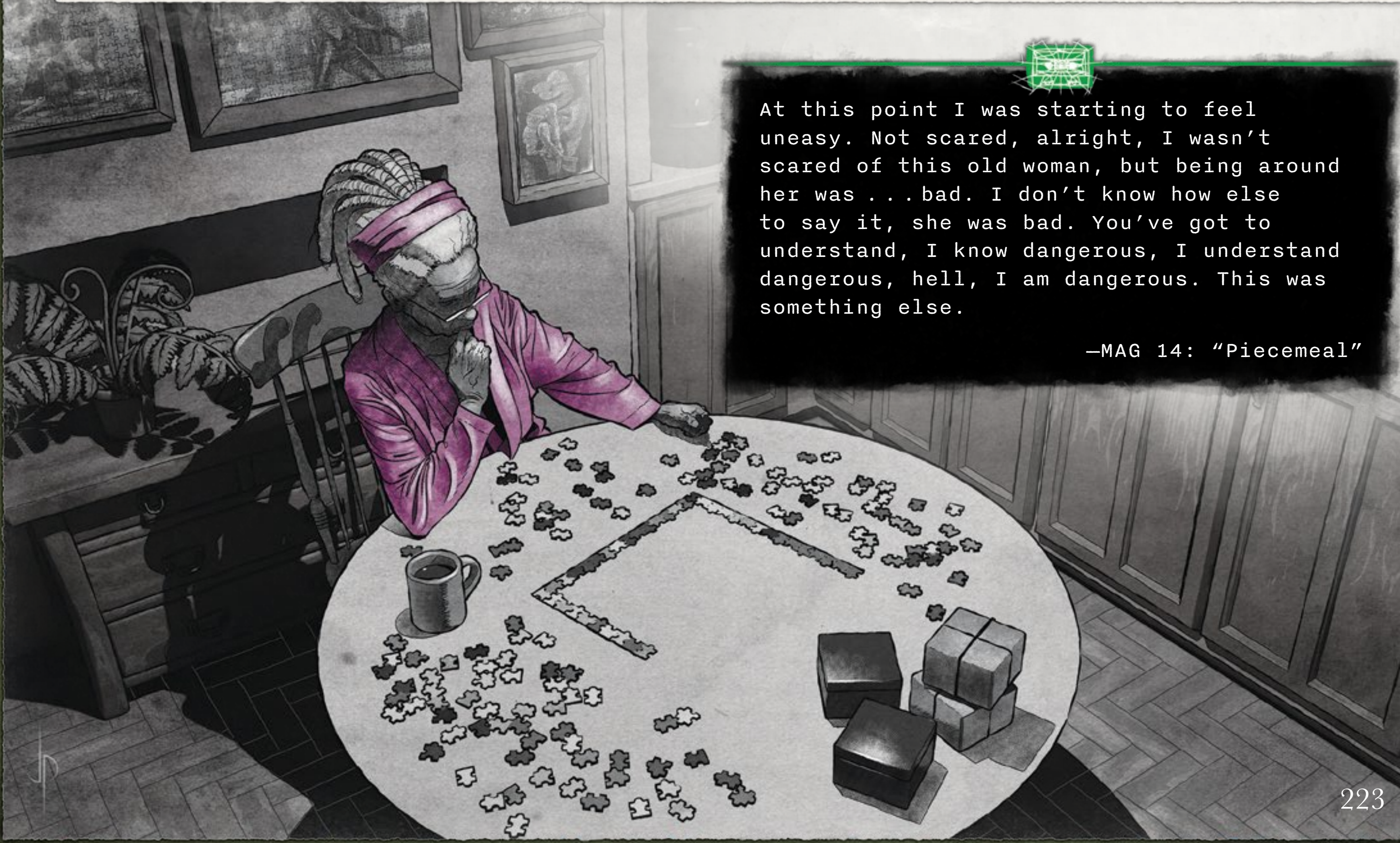
She has the following options:

Amputating Defense: Anyone attacking The Jigsaw Lady must first succeed on an Intellect defense roll. On a failed roll, they instead spend the next minute chewing off their own hand, gaining 2 points of Stress each round. The effect ends early if the target succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on their turn, or when they've gained 6 points of Stress from the chewing and their hand falls off, giving them a serious injury.

Jigsaw Curse: If provided with someone's name and an object stolen from them, The Jigsaw Lady performs a ritual (which includes starting a new jigsaw puzzle). Afterward, the target receives a delivery of a severed body part (beginning with an extremity) every day or two. On a failed Intellect defense roll, the target can't help but open the package. Within hours, they lose that same body part through apparent misadventure, gaining 1 point of Stress that can't be restored until the curse is lifted. The victim must successfully resist opening five packages to end the curse. If a target is murdered before the curse kills them, the curse is passed to the killer.

Interaction: The Jigsaw Lady offers coffee or tea to visitors, but once business begins, she stares at potential clients with a flinty, dangerous look that belies her age and surroundings.

Use: The characters wouldn't be the first to underestimate The Jigsaw Lady. The true ghastliness of her attention is revealed if a PC gains her curse.



> At this point I was starting to feel uneasy. Not scared, alright, I wasn't scared of this old woman, but being around her was . . . bad. I don't know how else to say it, she was bad. You've got to understand, I know dangerous, I understand dangerous, hell, I am dangerous. This was something else.
>
> —MAG 14: "Piecemeal"

LIGHTLESS BEAST 4 (12)

2

GM intrusion: *The beast grabs the character's flashlight and destroys it.*

The Dark, page 171

Lightless beasts are fear of the dark made flesh. They reveal themselves in their prey's home at bedtime, creeping closer. Their advance ceases if the target hides under the blankets or switches on the light. But days or weeks later, they attack and attempt to pull their prey into The Dark. If they succeed, all that's left behind is a patch of dark, foul-smelling fluid.

Related Entity: The Dark
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short; immediate when phasing through floors, walls, etc.
Modifications: Speed defense as level 4 due to being hard to see in dim or dark light; perception as level 8
Combat: A lightless beast attacks with whipping tendrils.

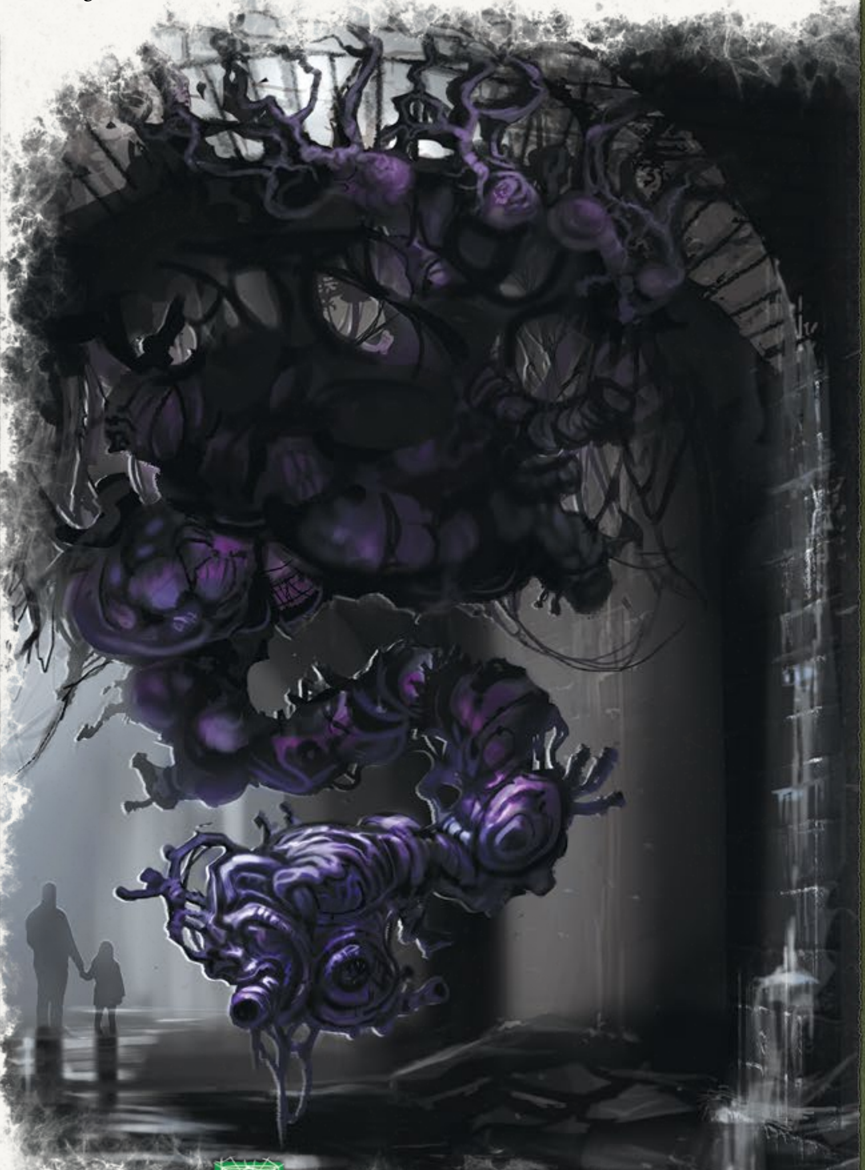
A beast also has the following abilities:

Dark Comfort: Beasts regain 2 points of health per round unless subject to bright light, which they flee from.

Drown in the Dark: A target who suffers damage from the beast must succeed on a Might defense task or gain 2 points of Stress. The affected target must continue making Might defense tasks each round until they succeed, which ends the progression, or take another level of Stress. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on one, they are paralyzed and can't move for about a minute. If a beast isn't distracted, it can grab a paralyzed target and drag them into the ground, a nearby body of water, or a wall, into The Dark. Most suffering this fate are never seen again.

Interaction: Lightless beasts are sapient and may whisper threats, clear and crisp, such as, "The blanket does nothing" or something similar.

Use: A lone character might be able to overcome a lightless beast that emerges from a darkened closet or from under the bed if they don't give in to fear, but even a group of prepared PCs would find an encounter with The Still and Lightless Beast almost impossible without special preparations.



Lightless beasts are lesser versions—"shadows"—of their progenitor, the singular being known as The Still and Lightless Beast, which most often manifests when called by The Taker of Light (page 239).

The Still and Lightless Beast: *level 7, Speed defense as level 4 due to being hard to see, perception as level 8; health 25; movement short, or immediate when phasing through floors, walls, etc.; attacks with whipping tendrils; can darken a whole city block once per month before coming for a target*

> It was impossible to make out any details of the form that stood in the doorway, it was simply a patch of shadow even darker than the night that surrounded it. A silhouette in the pitch black. At first I thought it was a trick of my eyes adjusting to the dark, but then it began to move. Its body was fat and bulbous, with no limbs or head, so when it came towards me it did so with a slow, undulating pulse along the floor. I could see its outside was covered in what might have been feelers or fleshy tubes, and as it gradually made its way towards me I could see them flicking out and spasming wildly, in what looked horribly like excitement.
>
> —MAG 86: "Tucked In"

LONESOME CROWD 5 (15) 1

Encountered in underpopulated, oddly quiet neighborhoods, the crowd's dull murmuring is at first the familiar rolling babble of incomprehensible noise that comes from dozens of voices talking at once. But once someone tries to move through or is otherwise caught up in the crowd, the realization dawns that the crowd isn't composed of people; it's just a crowd. A crowd without any people in which the newcomer is completely alone.

Those who never win free of a lonesome crowd become faceless parts of it.

The Lonely, page 174

Related Entity: The Lonely

Health: 33

Damage Inflicted: 2 points of Stress

Movement: Immediate

Modifications: Speed defense as level 2

Combat: A lonesome crowd isn't fast, but it automatically lures in and envelops all targets in immediate range who fail an Intellect defense roll. Once part of the lonesome crowd, the following consequences apply.

Escaping the Crowd: Enveloped targets can attempt another Intellect defense roll each round as long as they concentrate on someone they are closely connected to, such as a family member, friend, pet, or lover. Three successful defense rolls allow the target to win free. Multiple targets who hold hands while lost in the crowd together ease the defense roll by one step per person beyond the first.

Isolating Jostling: A target enveloped by the crowd gains 2 points of Stress each minute they remain part of it, not only from the jostling and bumping, but also because of their recognition of the crowd's true nature.

Lost to the Crowd: If a target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they are lost forever, becoming one more blurred, screaming face.

Protective Crush: For someone who is caught in the crowd, attempts to physically damage it are hindered by three steps.

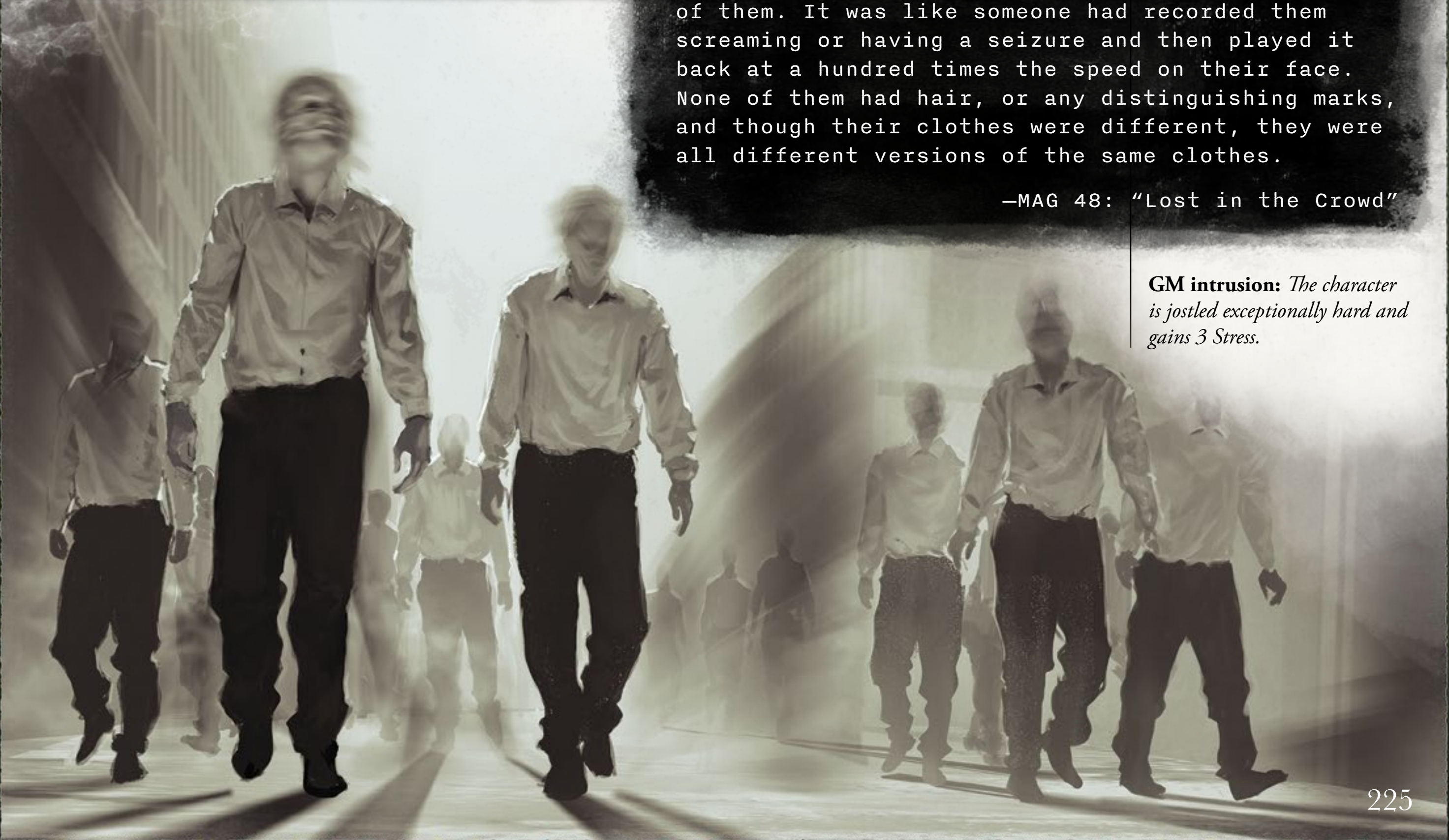
Interaction: The flow of people moves this way and that, but without purpose other than to isolate anyone who becomes part of it.

Use: A lonesome crowd is very dangerous to a lone PC, but less so to groups who stick together.

A lonesome crowd might find a PC who is exploring alone or who has traits that tend to isolate them, or simply because they've been marked by association with the paranormal.

> The more I listened, the more I realised it, it wasn't a language. There were no words, it was just noise. Just a noise being made by the people around me. Then I started to focus on those people and that's when I began to scream.
>
> Their faces were a blur, each and every one of them. It was like someone had recorded them screaming or having a seizure and then played it back at a hundred times the speed on their face. None of them had hair, or any distinguishing marks, and though their clothes were different, they were all different versions of the same clothes.
>
> —MAG 48: "Lost in the Crowd"

GM intrusion: *The character is jostled exceptionally hard and gains 3 Stress.*



THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE 6 (18)

2

The Spiral, page 175

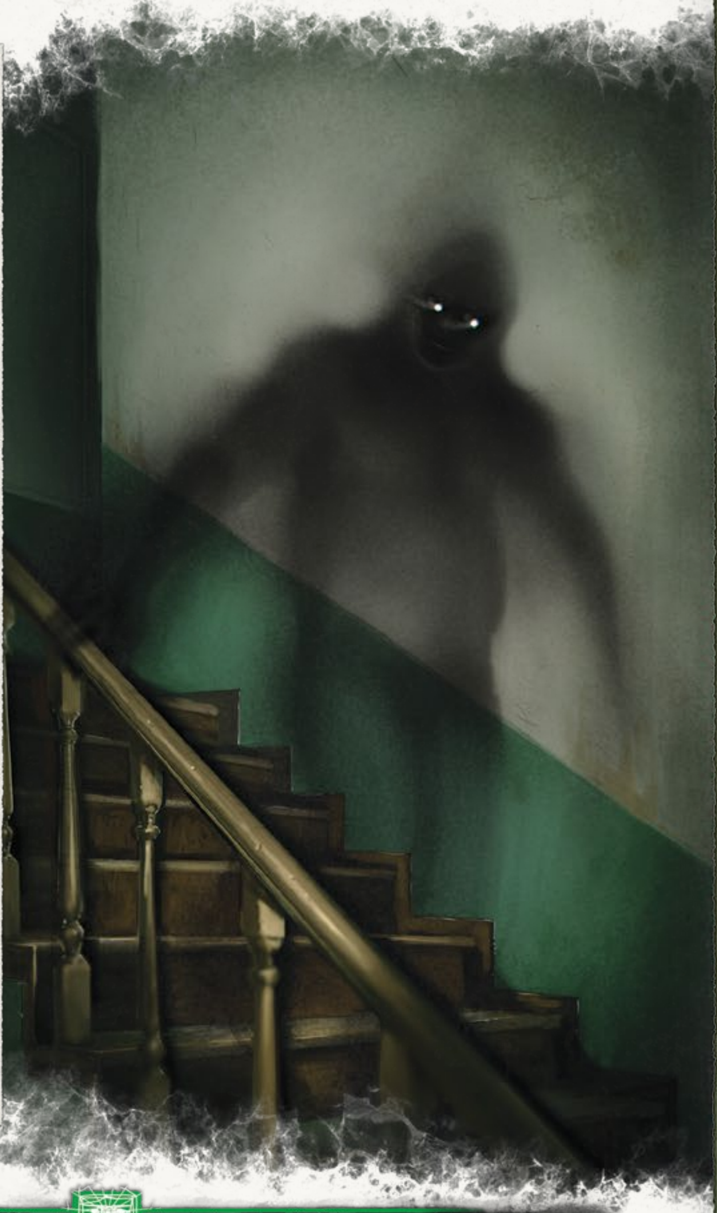
A haunting presence that gradually leads you further and further from reality and sanity, The Man Who Wasn't There is most drawn to people that call to him. With that connection to non-existence established, everyone and everything around you begins forgetting that you ever existed.

Related Entity: The Spiral
Health: 18
Damage Inflicted: 2 points of Stress
Movement: Short; can move through solid objects at will
Modifications: Stealth as level 10
Combat: The Man Who Wasn't There's touch deals 2 points of Stress. The Man Who Wasn't There also has the following traits:

- *Blot Out Memory:* Targets in immediate range that fail an Intellect defense roll are stunned for one minute, taking no action (unless attacked, which snaps them out of the condition). When the effect wears off naturally, the target has no recollection of encountering The Man, unless The Man wants them to.
- *On the Stair:* The Man Who Wasn't There can appear on almost any stairwell.
- *Spiraling Stair:* A target who addresses or calls for The Man and fails an Intellect defense roll slowly becomes less and less real, with other people forgetting their name or even that they're present. The target must succeed on three Intellect defense rolls (one per day) to escape the effect. Each failed roll inflicts 1 level of Stress on the target. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they become the new Man Who Wasn't There. Only one target at a time is affected.
- *Unreal:* The Man is immaterial and takes no damage from mundane physical sources. He takes half damage from paranormal sources and full damage from weapons designed to affect Entity servitors. The Man can also go into a state of apparent non-existence for hours, days, or much longer.

Interaction: The Man never speaks, but his smirk becomes a smile as his victim becomes more unreal, and The Man (at least to the victim) becomes more solid. If he succeeds in passing the mantle, he laughs joyfully, until realizing he died long ago. His scream is cut short by his throat decomposing, rotten flesh sloughing, and brittle bone collapsing.

Use: The Man Who Wasn't There is not so much a threat to one's life, but rather to one's existence. It's likely that PCs can only hope to flee from him.



GM intrusion: *Even though the character is obviously in need of assistance or tries to contact an ally, the ally doesn't see or hear the character for a couple of rounds or longer.*

> For obvious reasons I can't describe him. I can barely describe his absence. I could try to say that his . . . hypothesis was tall and wide. Conceptually, he could have had arms that stretched away from a soft-looking torso, with stubby fingers that did not grip the banisters tight enough to splinter. If he had had a face, it would have been unremarkable, with a small, plump mouth that failed to quite turn into a smile.
>
> He didn't speak, so I couldn't hear his offer to join him on the staircase. But I accepted.
>
> —MAG 85: "Upon the Stair"

MEAT WITH EYES

4 (12)

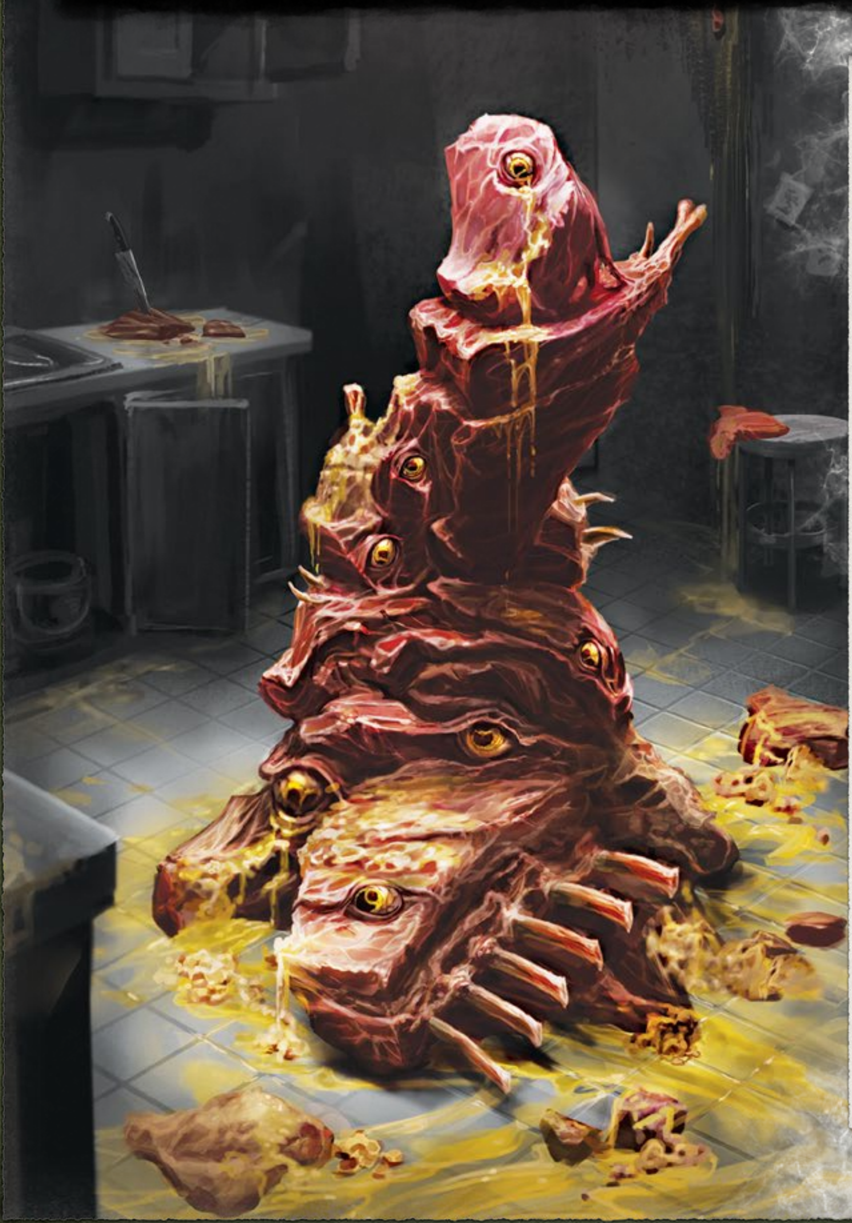
2

Meat with eyes rarely arises spontaneously. Instead, it must be slowly pieced into existence, one meticulously gathered slab of flesh at a time, piled in an enclosed space, and left to rot. The pestilent mass of moldering meat opens all its eyes and shudders into a golem-like animation if someone suffering from "carrion-o-philia" willingly adds their own, already putrescent corpse to the pile.

> There, in the centre of the floor, was a pile of discarded meat and bone, stacked almost as high as a person. It seemed less decayed than the rest of it, though that foul yellow fluid oozed from it and—this is the reason I'm talking to your institute, you see. Everything else could be put down to the problems of a very, very sick man, nothing supernatural about it, but . . . when I looked at that heaped pile of meat, it moved. I don't know how . . . I don't know quite how to explain it, other than to tell you that it opened its eyes. It opened all its eyes.
>
> —MAG 18: "The Man Upstairs"

GM intrusion: *As the character prepares to eat their sandwich, eyes in layers of meat open.*

The Corruption, page 170



Related Entity: The Corruption
Health: 13
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Perception as level 7; stealth as level 2 due to stench
Combat: Meat with eyes attacks with a rotting touch.
Meat with eyes also has the following abilities:

Engulf: The meat heaves its entire mass, covering a target within immediate range who fails a Speed defense roll. A covered target takes damage each round and can't take other physical actions until they succeed on a Might roll as their action to squirm free. A target who dies from this damage is consumed by the meat with eyes, and their body becomes part of the creature.

Overpowering Stench: The meat "burps," releasing a toxic plume of gas that fills an immediate area. Targets in the area that fail a Might defense roll lose their next turn retching.

Regenerate: If the meat with eyes has absorbed living flesh within the last hour, it regenerates 3 points of health per round.

Rotting Spittle: The meat spits gibbous pus at a target in short range. On a hit, the target takes damage from the unexpectedly acidic whitish goo, and on a failed Might defense roll, loses their next turn retching.

Interaction: Meat with eyes seeks to revolt, horrify, and ultimately consume those it encounters.

Use: A disgusting sight, an instance of meat with eyes is certain to nauseate characters, possibly making them question reality. But such a mass of meat could be defeated with determination, assuming it doesn't slip away to find carrion to consume.

MIRROR HAUNT 3 (9) 2

The Eye, page 172

Mirror of beholding, page 260

The Distortion, page 216

Sometimes the feeling that someone is watching you is nothing. But if the sensation grows over time until you feel that there's nowhere you can go, no place you can hide from its constant scrutiny, perhaps you've gained the attention of a mirror haunt.

Intangible aspects of The Eye, mirror haunts feed by watching a victim over time, driving them to distraction with the pressure of their incessant gaze. Usually, the victim can't even see the mirror haunt. Rather, they feel the attention burrowing into the back of their neck until they can't eat, can't sleep, until the haunt finally drives them into an early grave one way or another.

Related Entity: The Eye

Health: 6

Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress

Movement: Short

Modifications: Perception and stealth as level 10

Combat: A mirror haunt is an intangible, invisible presence that usually can't be physically fought but instead only endured.

Instigating Event: A target looking into a reflective surface influenced by the Entities in some fashion—such as a mirror of beholding—could catch a glimpse of a passing mirror haunt. If the target meets the haunt's gaze, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or become its subject of observation.

Shedding Attention: A target can shed a haunt's attention through extreme methods, including traveling through The Distortion so the haunt loses them, convincing an Avatar of The Eye to call it off, blinding themself (possibly only temporarily—but for at least a week), or somehow materializing the haunt and killing it.

Subject of Observation: The affected target feels the pressure of the haunt's gaze at all times. Each day, they gain 3 points of Stress from this attention, and after three full days, their intrusion range increases by 1 (1–2 on a d20) and could increase again every few weeks.

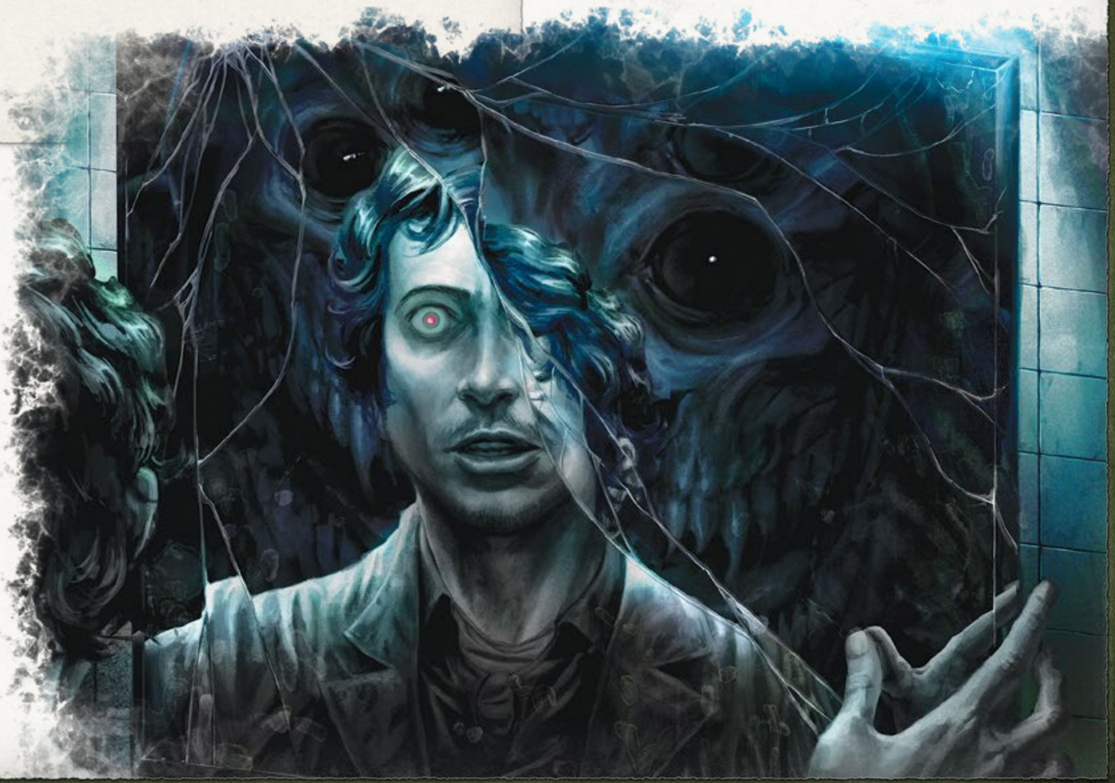
Interaction: The haunt's attention, once gained, never wavers.

Use: A haunt's attention isn't immediately lethal, but it's hardly welcome. It could motivate PCs to seek help from dangerous sources, perhaps a dabbler or someone else who collects or hoards Entity-related books.

> I could see a face staring in.
>
> It was dark outside, and it was almost entirely in shadow, so I couldn't tell you much about the features, but it was huge, seeming to take up most of the window behind me. The only thing about it that I could see with any real clarity were the eyes. Bright, shining, bulging eyes, with pupils so dark it made me feel sick, drinking everything in, watching with a greedy intensity. I could feel its gaze burning into the back of my neck, feel its unblinking eyes.
>
> —MAG 60: "Observer Effect"

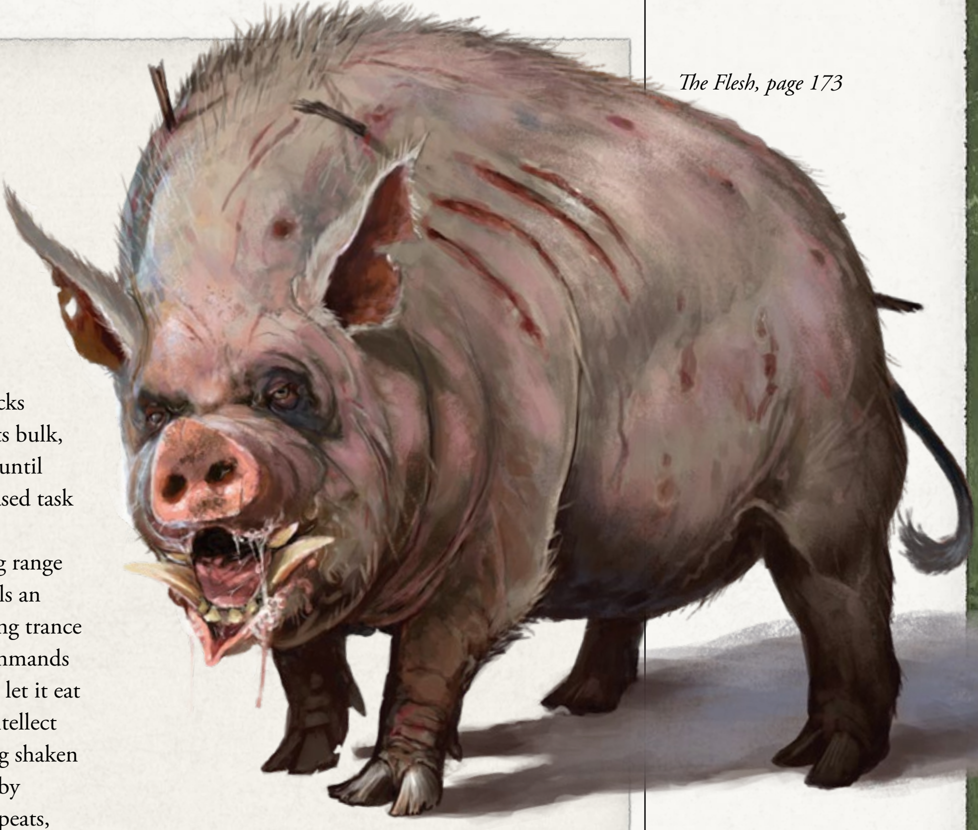
Dabbler, page 209

GM intrusion: *The watched character catches another unexpected glimpse of the mirror haunt in a reflected surface, which startles them at an inopportune moment, causing them to trip, drop something important, yell out at the wrong time, etc. on a failed Intellect defense roll.*



MONSTER PIG 6 (18) 1

Monster Pig is huge, weighing in at around 880 pounds (400 kg). That's big for a pig. Bigger than big; it's monstrous. And it's hungry. A thin trickle of pink saliva glistens around its mouth. Its hide is covered in small scars. Shot scars, most of them, with others left by spikes or axes. One scar looks like finger marks.



Related Entity: The Flesh
Health: 30
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Speed defense as level 4 due to tremendous size
Combat: Monster Pig attacks by butting with its massive bulk.
It also has the following options:

Crush: If the target fails a Speed defense roll, the pig backs them into a wall or knocks them to the ground, crushing them with its bulk, automatically damaging them each round until they can escape with a successful Might-based task as their action.

Delivery of the Flesh: A target within long range who Monster Pig wants to eat and who fails an Intellect defense roll falls into a sleepwalking trance for ten minutes. Monster Pig mentally commands them to come to where it is, lie down, and let it eat them. An affected target can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to break free. Being shaken also breaks the effect (but not being eaten by Monster Pig). While affected, the target repeats, over and over, "Long pig. Short pig. Wide pig. Narrow pig."

Eternal Flesh: Monster Pig regains 2 points of health per round, even when at 0 health.

Interaction: Monster Pig doesn't rampage. Instead, it insinuates itself into someone's pig herd and begins eating all the food, the other pigs, and occasionally, nearby people, though rarely the pig keeper.

Use: Monster Pig isn't usually an immediate, life-ending threat when encountered. It's only when the truth of its sheer inexorable ability to consume is realized that it becomes something PCs need to evade or perhaps deal with by luring it into a pit filled with wet cement.

The Flesh, page 173

GM intrusion: *The character, investigating the disappearance of an acquaintance, glances down and sees that person's face, gnawed from their skull and lying in the pigsty; the character gains 3 Stress.*

> I hadn't checked on the pigs in a while, but the next time I headed into the sty . . . there it was, sat in the corner, just encompassing the corner, its bulk filling the place out as the other, smaller pigs tried to find somewhere to be that wasn't next to it. It just sat there, and stared at me. I didn't like staring back at it. It made me feel strange, like it was sorting me into cuts of meat. There was more in those eyes than I'd ever seen in another pig; hidden among the rolls of pink flesh, they had malice in them. The pig wanted to hurt me. I'm sure of that.
>
> —MAG 103: "Cruelty Free"

NOTTHEM 6 (18) 2

Someone is impersonating your mother, your cousin, or maybe your child. Only you realize it. Even old photos show the imposter at weddings, on outings, and posing for selfies, not the person you used to know.

The Stranger, page 175

Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short; short when climbing
Modifications: Disguise as level 8
Combat: In their monstrous form, NotThem's long, spindly limbs brutally squeeze a foe within immediate range.

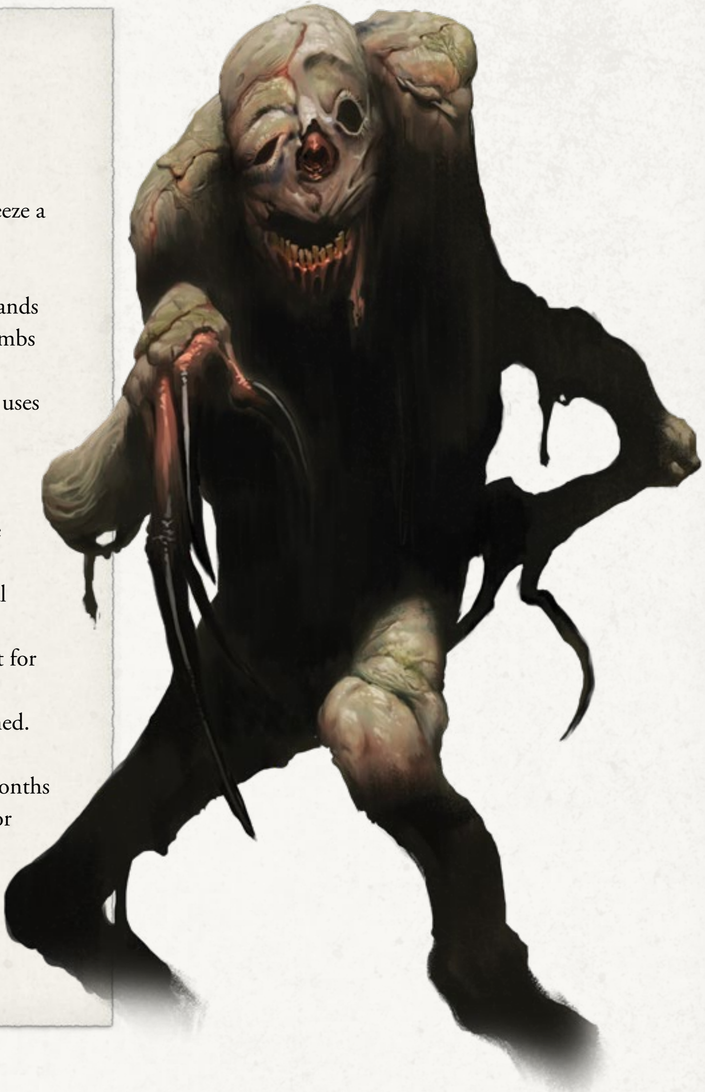
NotThem also has the following traits.

Monstrous Shape: If NotThem wishes to make a squeeze attack with their hands and arms, they elongate, stretching into a long, thin monster with sticklike limbs that have too many joints. If NotThem kills a target, they have the option of "wearing" the corpse. That guise might become the "stranger" that NotThem uses to torment their next victim.

Stranger in Our Midst: Each time a target is confronted with evidence that a complete stranger—NotThem—has replaced someone in their life and they're the only one who realizes it, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or gain 2 points of Stress. Examples include seeing NotThem in their assumed role, seeing altered photos showing NotThem in place of the original person, and witnessing others interact with NotThem as if everything is fine. Once a target has gained Stress from this effect, they are immune to the effect for the next few days.

Interaction: NotThem acts similarly to the person whose identity they've assumed. But once their target realizes something is wrong, they begin to play up that wrongness—subtly at first, but more aggressively over time, until weeks or months later, when their target's fear has reached its maximum, they either move on or kill their target.

Use: It's difficult for those not targeted by NotThem to recognize the truth. But if PCs successfully see past the mask, fleeing is the best option even competent characters have for surviving NotThem if they don't have a plan to deal with this powerful being.



GM intrusion: *The character's ally intervenes on behalf of NotThem against the character, completely taken in by the impersonation.*

> I sat in an armchair and he took the sofa opposite, sitting stiffly in a way that seemed far too still. Neither of us said a word. He just stared at me, smile still wide and something twinkling in his eyes that might have been amusement. Or triumph. He showed no desire to make any sort of conversation, and I was too terrified to say anything at all.
>
> [. . .] At one point, it almost seemed like his neck was too long, but when I looked again it was normal. The only two things I knew for sure was that I had never been as scared as I was just then, and that I did not know this man.
>
> —MAG 78: "Distant Cousin"

PERFECT STRANGER 3 (9)

1

A perfect stranger looks normal. Unremarkable in their jeans and white shirt. So normal, in fact, that once you look away, it's difficult to remember distinguishing features. Other than the way they stare, unblinking, and their creepy silence, as if they're not breathing at all. Until they start breathing midway through an interaction, as if suddenly recalling that's what humans do.

The Stranger, page 175

Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Intellect defense as level 7
Combat: A perfect stranger batters with their fists with no regard for any damage they might inflict on themselves.

A perfect stranger also has the following options.

Disquieting Presence: After interacting with one or more perfect strangers for a couple of rounds, characters must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or suffer 1 point of Stress due to the alienating, unnatural way the perfect stranger conducts themself. Continued interaction doesn't render someone immune to the effect; each minute of interaction or new interaction requires another defense roll.

Pliant Flesh: The stranger regains 4 points of health if they spend their action concentrating.

Shape Flesh: A stranger's flesh is alive-ish and amenable to their will. One that spends several hours concentrating can form new organs or complex tissue (lungs, livers, teeth, etc.) within themselves, either where expected or where they just shouldn't be. A stranger can induce the same effect in plants—for example, creating human teeth, as if smiling, inside an apple.

Interaction: Perfect strangers are aspects of The Stranger that exist primarily to disquiet and alienate regular people. However, they also take on more active roles to help other aspects and Avatars of The Stranger, such as helping to arrange for the Unknowing, a ritual meant to warp reality.

Use: Perfect strangers make ideal atmospheric encounters. They could be NPCs that don't initially seem that important that somehow give PCs the willies, whose presence over the course of a few encounters grows more existential. They're tough, but certainly something a character could defeat one on one if it came to it.

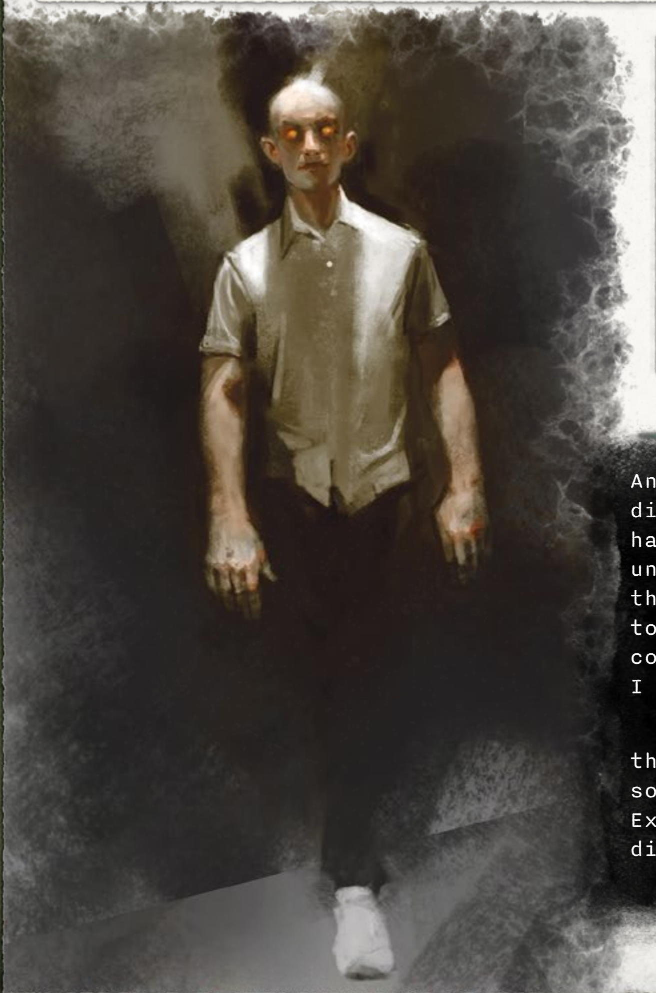
NAMES

Perfect strangers usually have placeholder names common in various countries, like John and Jane Doe are used in the United States. Examples:

Mario Rossi, Erika Mustermann, Jan Novak, Piotr Petrov, Pavel Petrov, Jane Citizen, Fulan al-Fulani, Juan Pérez, Monsieur Dupont, Hanako Yamada, Ram Sharma.

The Unknowing, page 175

GM intrusion: *The character finds, trips over, or is sent a bag of human teeth.*



> And then came our first of two sessions in the dissection room. We were looking at the skeleton. I had been dreading this. Given exactly how creepy and unsettling the students were just sat in a classroom, the idea of what they could do when given access to human remains made me feel quite nauseous. But I couldn't bring myself to leave them there alone, so I went.
>
> It was even worse than I'd feared, seeing them stood there over the bits of cadaver. Their faces, normally so neutral, were alive with . . . what was it I saw? Excitement? Curiosity? Hunger? Whatever it was, it didn't reach their eyes, still staring and blank.
>
> —MAG 34: "Anatomy Class"

THE PIPER 8 (24) 2

The Slaughter, page 174

To some, The Piper grants clemency. But the reprieve is brief, and lasts only long enough for the recipient to understand that, in fact, they can never escape the war.

Related Entity: The Slaughter
Health: 27
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Combat: The Piper usually plays their pipes, but might use other options, as follows:

Pay The Piper: The Piper plays their scrimshawed bone for a target within very long range (no more than once each hour). On a failed Intellect defense roll, the target seeks out the most violent and gory portion of the nearest conflict (which might mean they need to travel if no fighting is near), forgoing caution as they try to track down the source of the sad, whistling tune. Affected targets remain so for up to ten hours, until the fighting stops, or until they succeed on an Intellect defense roll on their turn.

Lambs to the Slaughter: The Piper spends its action playing the pipes (no more than once each day). All creatures in long range that fail an Intellect defense roll become frenzied and, taking up whatever weapons are available, attempt to slaughter whatever enemy The Piper names (or if none, attack each other) for one minute or until a target succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on their turn.

Weapons: The Piper attacks twice with a sword, spear, or long-range gun, usually against separate targets.

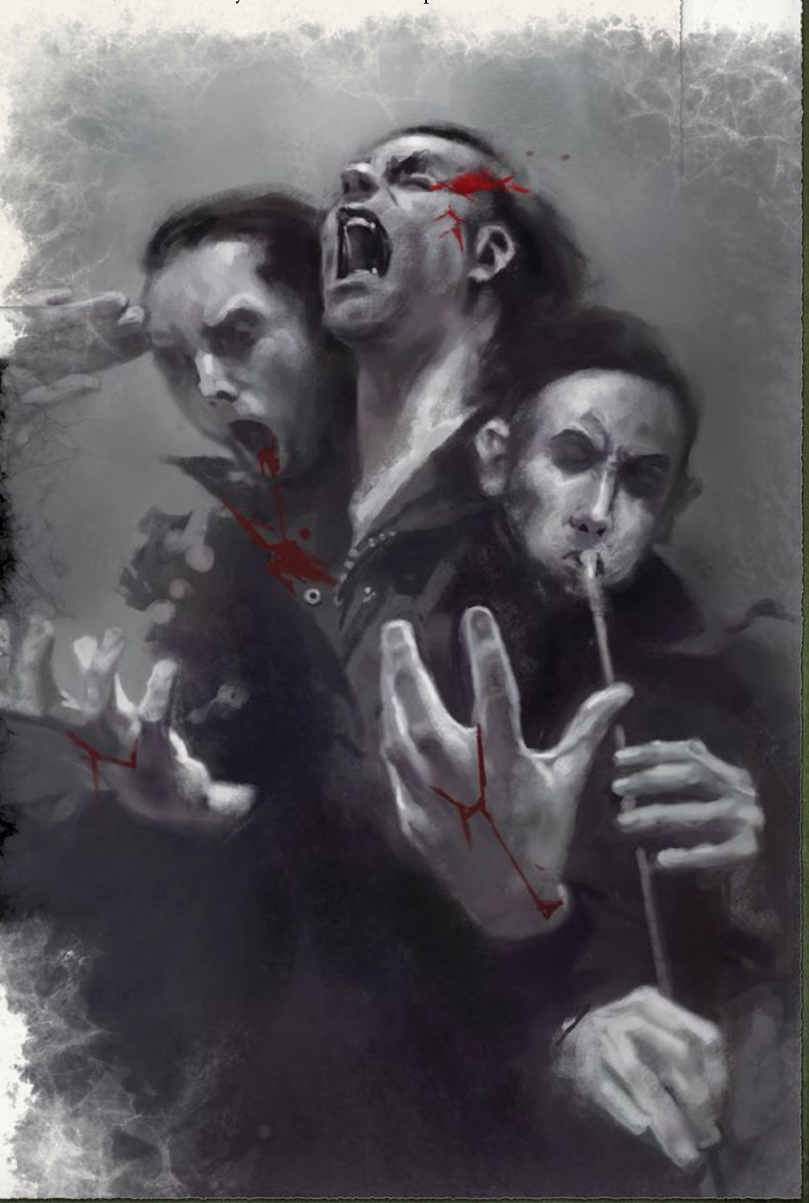
Fleeting Reprieve: A target within short range of The Piper who was killed by violence in the last hour—or who is about to be killed—is returned to life. The target understands they've been spared by a power beyond their understanding, and that soon, they'll be back in the grave, whenever The Piper calls in their debt.

Interaction: The Piper urges those who hear their faint, piping melody to give themselves up to senseless slaughter. In their own way, The Piper will negotiate; see Fleeting Reprieve.

Use: PCs should try to keep their interaction with this aspect of The Slaughter to a minimum, if any at all. The Piper, also known as "The War," is essentially the trauma of war personified.

> He told me it had three faces. One to play its pipes of scrimshawed bone, one to scream its dying battle cry and one that would not open its mouth, for when it did blood and sodden soil flowed out like a waterfall. Those arms that did not play the pipes were gripping blades and guns and spears, while others raised their hands in futile supplication of mercy, and one in a crisp salute. It wore a tattered coat of wool, olive green where it was not stained black, and beneath, nothing could be seen but a body beaten, slashed and shot until nothing remained but the wounds themselves.
>
> —MAG 7:"The Piper"

GM intrusion: *The character begins to hear The Piper's tune, but no one else can hear it. Does it portend the character's imminent death, or that The Piper has saved them from death for a time?*



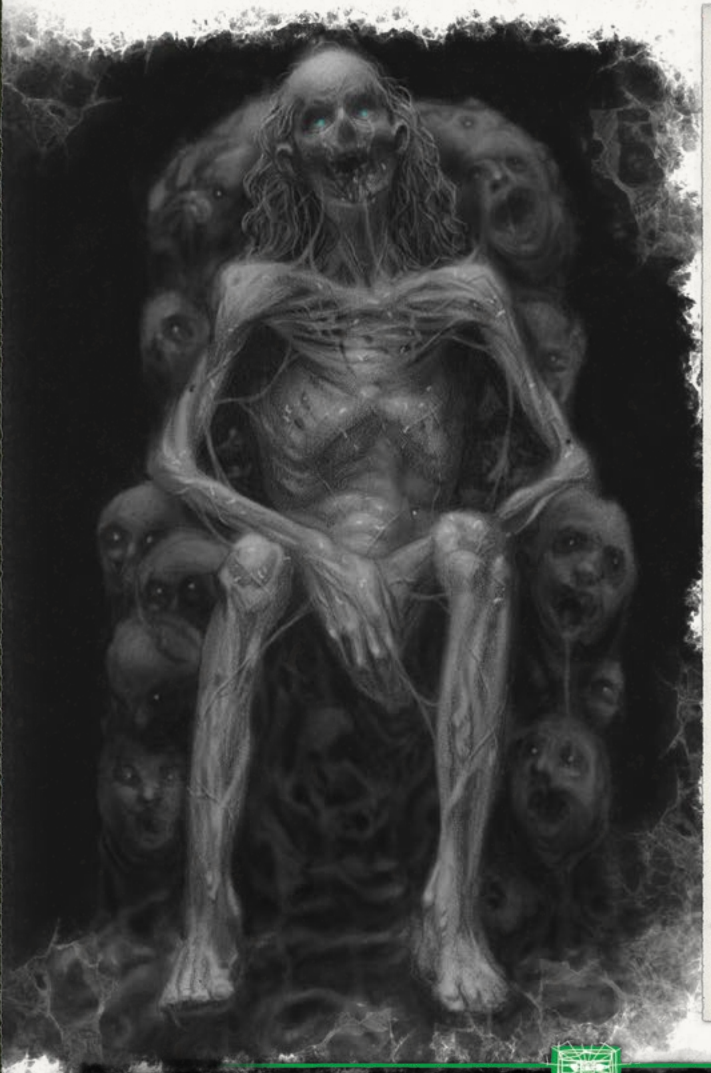
THE PLAGUEBEARER 5 (15) 2

The Plaguebearer is a lanky man with watery blue eyes and unruly dark hair. He's possessed of a fevered energy, and buzzing flies are drawn to him. Over time, the sicknesses within him incubate and grow more virulent. At their most malignant, he sits upon a dreadful throne formed from disease-wracked bodies mixed together like putty. Eyes stare out like horror-stricken stars, their exposed hearts beating for all to see, their voices trying to scream through things that aren't their throats.

Surveying his kingdom of the corrupted dying, The Plaguebearer smiles.

The Corruption, page 170

The Extinction, page 177



Related Entity: The Corruption and The Extinction

Health: 21

Damage Inflicted: Serious injury

Movement: Short

Modifications: Resists disease and poison as level 10

Combat: The Plaguebearer mostly relies on his paranormal abilities and traits in combat.

Infect: A target The Plaguebearer chooses within immediate range must succeed on a Might defense roll or contract a novel pathogen (level 5 disease) and immediately gain 2 points of Stress. Each day the affected target fails a Might defense roll, they take a serious injury. If the target succeeds on three Might defense rolls, they gradually improve and throw off the sickness.

Waxing Virulence: The malignance of the sicknesses he spreads increases over time. Initially, when diseased targets roll a 1 or a 2 (instead of just a 1), they trigger a GM intrusion. Every few days, the intrusion range increases, so that it happens on a roll of 1 to 3, then a roll of 1 to 4, and so on. These GM intrusions reveal some new grotesque symptom, such as melting skin, escaped entrails, an exposed heart, and so on.

Ascend the Throne: The Plaguebearer uses his Infect ability on all targets in a 2-mile (3 km) radius (no more than once every few years). Infected targets are drawn to him but can ignore that call with a successful Intellect defense roll each day.

Resurgent: If killed (rather than neutralized by being sealed away), The Plaguebearer reforms somewhere else within a few months.

Interaction: Dealing with The Plaguebearer is best done in a hazmat suit. He's usually uninterested in topics unrelated to epidemiology.

Use: If the PCs encounter The Plaguebearer within the first year of his resurgence, they can potentially deal with him, even if a few characters are sickened for a time. He's far more dangerous if his virulence is waxing and he sits on his throne of disease.

> Thin trails of blood and skin crisscrossed to the streets, and the walls and windows of nearby buildings were coated in a fine sheen of discarded gore. It didn't take me long to find my first victim, wrapped around a lamppost. He had clearly tried to lean on it for support in his distress, but his flesh had begun to spread and fuse over it in thick, ropey tendrils. His bones were almost bare to the elements.
>
> But it was then that I saw the thing that, to my mind, is perhaps the worst of it. His heart was exposed. It was beating fast, so fast, despite the awful green decay that seemed to be eating at it.
>
> —MAG 157: "Rotten Core"

GM intrusion: *The character's hazmat suit (or other protection) rips.*

The Plaguebearer's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is John Amherst.*

POSSESSED CANNIBAL 4 (12)

Possessed cannibals don't realize they're killing and eating people. Instead, they live normal lives, though they experience episodic ghastly visions, nightmares, or hallucinations. In truth, these figments hide any cannibalistic atrocity they commit from their conscious minds.

The Flesh, page 173

The Spiral, page 175

Related Entity: The Flesh and The Spiral
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Persuasion and initiative as level 6
Combat: Possessed cannibals use improvised weapons like fire pokers, cast-iron pots, and kitchen knives when their possession takes over.

They also have the following traits.

Completely Normal: Because they don't consciously know what they are, possessed cannibals can legitimately profess helpfulness or friendship, then ambush prey, easing their first attack by two steps.

Not Alone: In some cases, groups of possessed cannibals can converge on a party, bar scene, religious service, or other location where people gather. Working together makes them a much greater threat.

Realization: If a possessed cannibal is somehow induced to see their true actions (via paranormal means or expert persuasion), most collapse into shock and horror, no longer posing an immediate threat.

Contagious Cannibalism: A possessed cannibal induced to comprehend their own culpability and then killed or subject to a religious exorcism rite passes their condition to the responsible target if the target fails an Intellect defense roll. A character suffering this condition must make an Intellect defense roll every few days or have a "hallucination" during which they give in to demonic cannibalistic commands.

Interaction: When not actively attempting to eat someone, the possessed cannibal seems entirely normal, if somewhat troubled by "concentration issues" they've been having of late. If someone tries to tell them they're a cannibal, they usually hear only bells or other deafening sounds.

Use: A lone possessed cannibal won't pose too much trouble to a character, except for the existential threat of the character becoming possessed themself. If so afflicted, a character who realizes it might find aid from agents of another Entity or a dabbler.

Dabbler, page 209

POSSESSED CANNIBAL NAMES

Possessed cannibals have entirely ordinary names. Examples:

Edwin Burroughs, Bethany O'Connor, David Fabray, Erica Babcock, Luke MacBride, Jill Tamayo, Mark Wagner.

GM intrusion: *The character finds a stashed corpse with its face eaten off and gains 2 Stress on a failed Intellect defense roll.*

`It was strange, the rich cloth curtain that covered that ornate metal box seemed stuck, so I pulled and pulled and eventually it came free. I opened the door and retrieved the Host, returning it to the altar. Then I . . . I lifted it to my mouth, and I ate. It did not taste as I expected.`

`I'm sure you've guessed the reality of what it was I was eating. I don't even know where I was, some dingy basement from what it seemed when the light fell from my eyes and I returned to reality. At least, I assume this is reality. I dream, sometimes, that perhaps this is the illusion—my arrest and imprisonment merely a hallucination. That I'm not a murdering cannibal.`

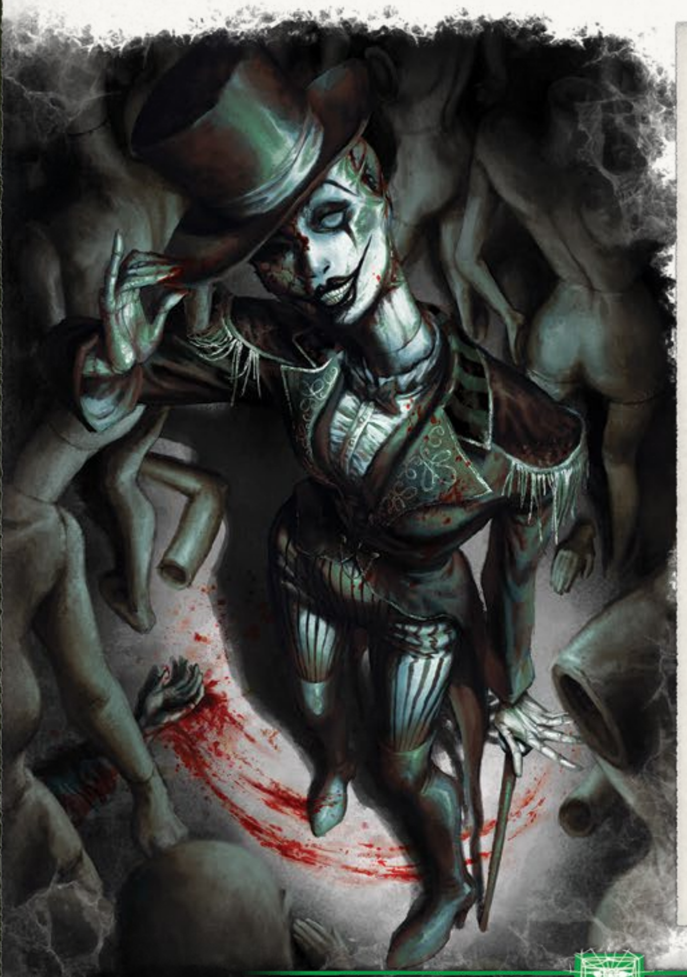
`—MAG 20: "Desecrated Host"`

THE RINGMASTER 6 (18) 1

Sometimes she appears as a plastic female mannequin dressed as a circus ringmaster. Other times she disguises herself as a human using skin harvested by her, her agents, or The Anglerfish. Whatever her guise, The Ringmaster is one of the most capable agents of The Stranger, spreading existential angst, confusion, and identity collapse. She hopes to ultimately change reality itself into a place where survivors are unable to tell others or themselves apart from simple objects and other people.

The Anglerfish, page 197
The Stranger, page 175

Debilitated, page 132



Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 27
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Disguise as level 7 when impersonating a living thing
Combat: The Ringmaster attacks with a set of razor-sharp knives.
She also has the following traits and abilities.

- *Harvest Skin:* If she wishes to take a target's skin, successful attacks she makes with her knives are surgically precise, designed so that when she has dealt enough damage to render a target debilitated, she can use her next turn to strip their skin in a single quick motion if they fail a Might defense roll. A harvested skin also inflicts a serious injury.
- *Wear a Skin:* The Ringmaster can assume the identity of someone whose skin she, The Anglerfish, or one of her uncanny mannequins harvests. The skin retains enough life that it gives The Ringmaster knowledge of the existence it once had, even as it silently screams.
- *In the Company of Mannequins:* It's rare that The Ringmaster is encountered without at least a couple of uncanny mannequins nearby.

Interaction: The Ringmaster relishes the attention she gains by putting on a good show, though "good" means horrifying anyone watching. She's not shy about describing her plan to enact the great ritual known as the Unknowing, which will warp reality enough that The Stranger becomes the world's new "god."

Use: PCs may unknowingly interact with disguised uncanny mannequins and skin shells for some time before they run into The Ringmaster behind it all. Perhaps by that time, the PCs will have gained enough resources that they can face her and/or disrupt things the next time she attempts the Unknowing.

ARCHIVIST: Who are you?

THE RINGMASTER: Well, my father called me Nikola, and then I killed him, so I thought I rather deserved to have his second name too. Which makes me Nikola Orsinov. Pleased to meet you at last.

ARCHIVIST: You, um . . . You killed Gregor Orsinov?

THE RINGMASTER: Yep! He got really boring, and I'm a monster. I mean, what do you want me to do—not pull him apart? I did use all the bits.

ARCHIVIST: I . . . Y . . . Y-You don't . . . sound Russian.

THE RINGMASTER: How could I sound anything, silly? I'm plastic. [*The sound of tapping on plastic.*] I don't even have a voicebox. I had to borrow this one.

ARCHIVIST: Uh . . .

THE RINGMASTER: Don't turn on the light.

—MAG 97: "We All Ignore the Pit"

Uncanny mannequin, page 241

The Unknowing, page 175

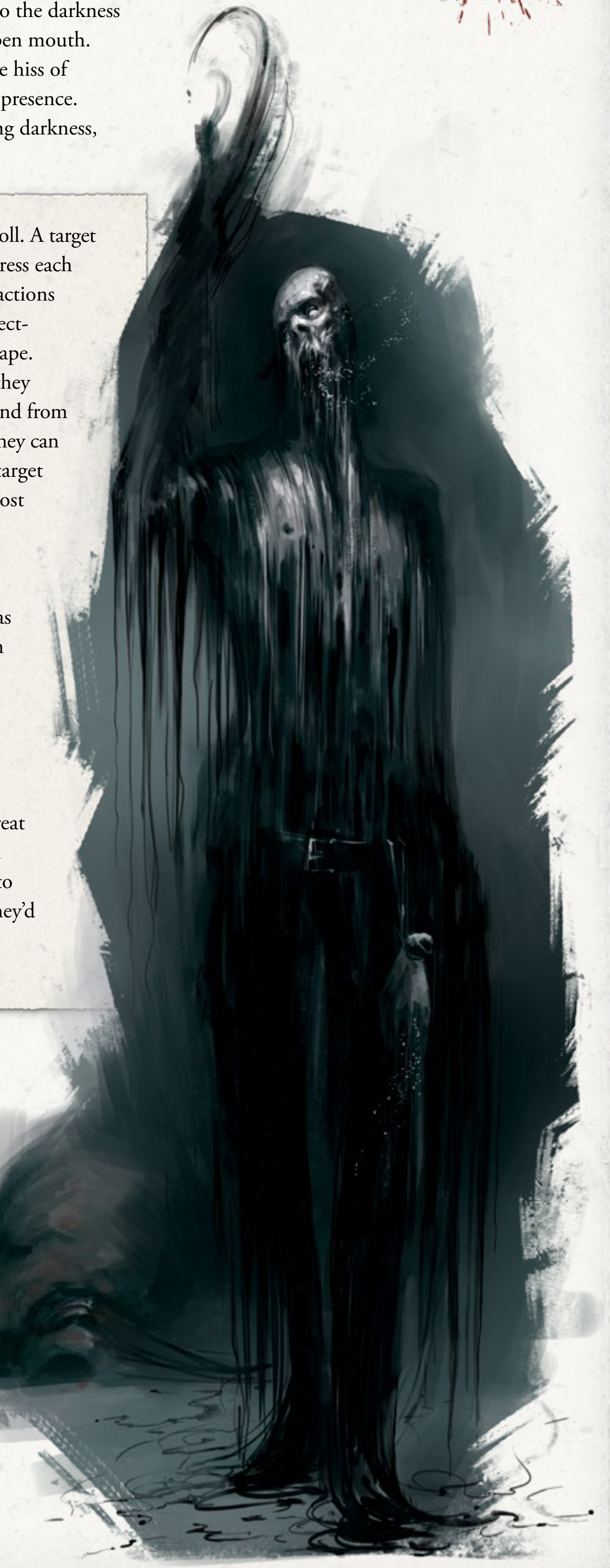
Skin shell, page 238

GM intrusion: *The character comes to believe that The Ringmaster or one of her agents is an ally for a few rounds.*

THE SANDMAN 6 (18) 1

The Dark, page 171

Tall and thin, The Sandman's silhouette bleeds into the darkness he's part of. Coarse black sand trickles from his open mouth. His gait is slow and torturous, accompanied by the hiss of leaking sand. Light curdles like rancid milk in his presence. Where he touches, the world dissolves into choking darkness, except for his awful, shifting face.



Related Entity: The Dark
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Combat: The Sandman attacks with his rasping touch.

He also has the following traits.

Abrading Sand: The Sandman flings a handful of razor-sharp sand at a target within immediate range. On a failed Might defense roll, the target takes damage and is blinded for one round.

Slumbering Gloom: The Sandman exhales a cloud of ebony sand (no more than once each minute) targeting all creatures in immediate range. Creatures that fail an Intellect defense roll fall asleep for one minute, or until they are damaged or shaken awake.

In addition, complete darkness fills the area for one minute, though the outline and/or the face of The Sandman may still be glimpsed inside periodically, as The Sandman wishes.

Topple Into Sack: The Sandman targets a creature in immediate range (no more than once each minute), pulling them into his pitch-black sack on a failed Speed defense roll. A target in the sack gains 3 points of Stress each round and can't take physical actions until they succeed on an Intellect-based roll as their action to escape. Alternately, a target is freed if they willingly blind themself with sand from The Sandman's pouch (which they can reach even inside the sack). A target who dies in the sack becomes lost forever in The Dark.

Interaction: The Sandman never speaks or negotiates. His presence means that a target has been designated, perhaps by an Avatar of The Dark or simply because The Sandman smells their fear.

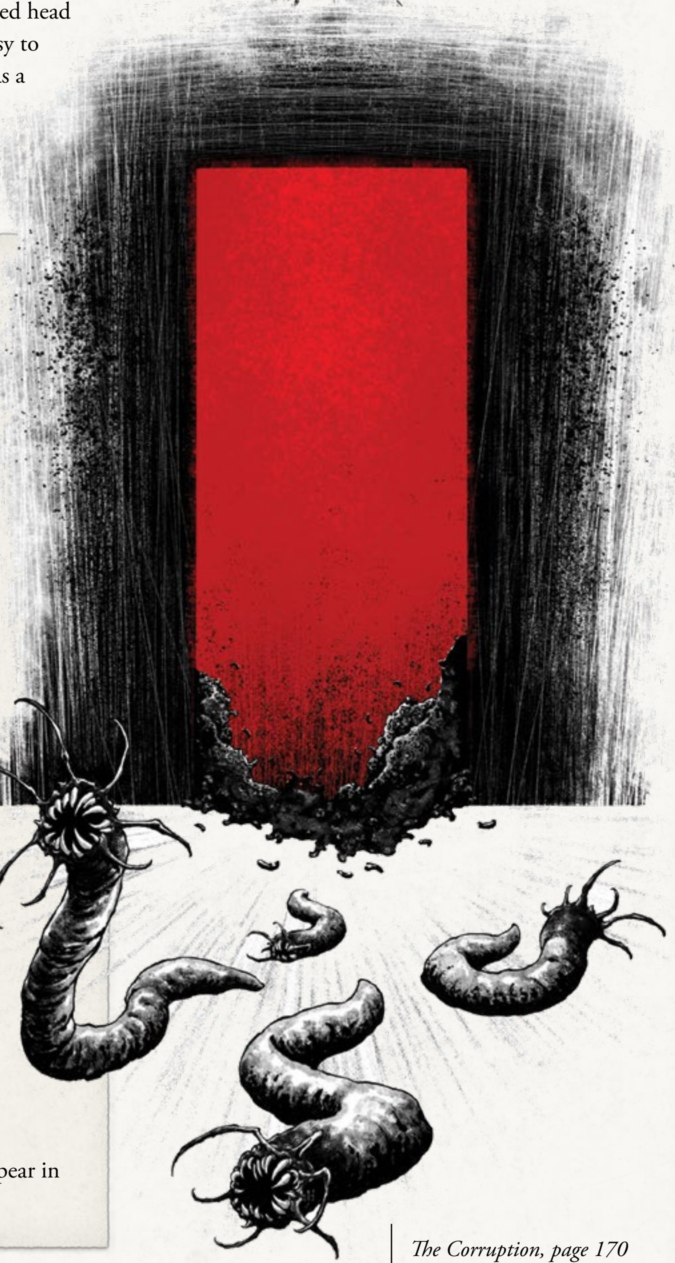
Use: The Sandman usually goes after lone sleepers but would prove an almost impossible threat to deal with permanently, even if a group somehow managed to lure him to a location where they'd prepared a trap.

> He was almost shaking with rage at this point, and I was momentarily concerned that the situation might descend into violence when, instead, he leaned forward and whispered with an intensity I had never before heard in a human voice: "Pray The Sandman only brings you sleep."
>
> —MAG 98: "Lights Out"

GM intrusion: *The character catches a glimpse of The Sandman's awful, shifting face, gaining 2 Stress. The target also stands frozen in terror if they fail an Intellect defense roll, losing their next turn.*

SILVER WORM 1 (3)

Just over an inch long, a silver worm's body is segmented, with a blackened head and mouthparts built for burrowing into flesh. In bright light, they're easy to see and smash. It's when they drop unexpectedly on a subject or appear as a swarm that their true threat is revealed. If even one tunnels its way into a living creature, the parasite gradually corrupts from the inside until the victim literally bursts open to birth a new colony of silver worms.



Related Entity: The Corruption

Health: 3

Damage Inflicted: 1 point of Stress

Movement: Immediate

Modifications: Speed defense and stealth as level 3 due to size

Combat: Silver worms bite.

They also have the following options:

Ambush: A silver worm lurks in darkness, clings under a handrail, or waits in a cupboard, relying on a surprise ambush to give it an edge. When a silver worm attacks prey in this manner, it attacks as a level 3 creature dealing 2 points of Stress, and its first attack is eased by two steps.

Burrowing Worms: A target bitten by one or more worms must spend the next round succeeding on a difficulty 3 Speed-based task to remove the worms. If they (and/or an ally) fail, the worm slips inside and the target is infested as a level 5 disease requiring three successful Might defense rolls (one per day) to clear. Each failed Might defense roll causes the target to descend one step on the damage track. If the target fails three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they become a colony under The Corruption's control.

Writhing Worms: If fifty or more worms are encountered together, they can attack once as a level 4 creature, inflicting 3 points of Stress to one target. A target bitten by the swarm is subject to Burrowing Worms, but their Speed-based task to remove the worms before one slips inside is hindered by two steps.

Interaction: Parasites, silver worms regard living creatures as potential sacs of flesh to corrupt.

Use: Silver worms can be dispatched fairly easily, although they often appear in huge numbers. Their real horror comes more from implication.

> The room was unrecognisable when I returned. There was a shape on the bed, where Harriet had laid, but it wasn't her anymore. I could barely make out anything even remotely human in the pile of pitted and warped flesh that now remained. The bed itself was slick and shiny with a dark fluid that dripped off the hanging sheets and onto the floor. But what truly repulsed me, what made me flee as I did, was what moved and squirmed on all of it. They covered every surface: the floor, the bed, what used to be Harriet, even the ceiling. A thick, moving carpet of pale, writhing worms.
>
> —MAG 6: "Squirm"

The Corruption, page 170

Colony: *level 2; releases a level 3 worm swarm attacking everything in short range for one round, destroying the colony; hit targets are also subject to Burrowing Worms*

GM intrusion: *A silver worm waits in ambush in the character's shoe.*

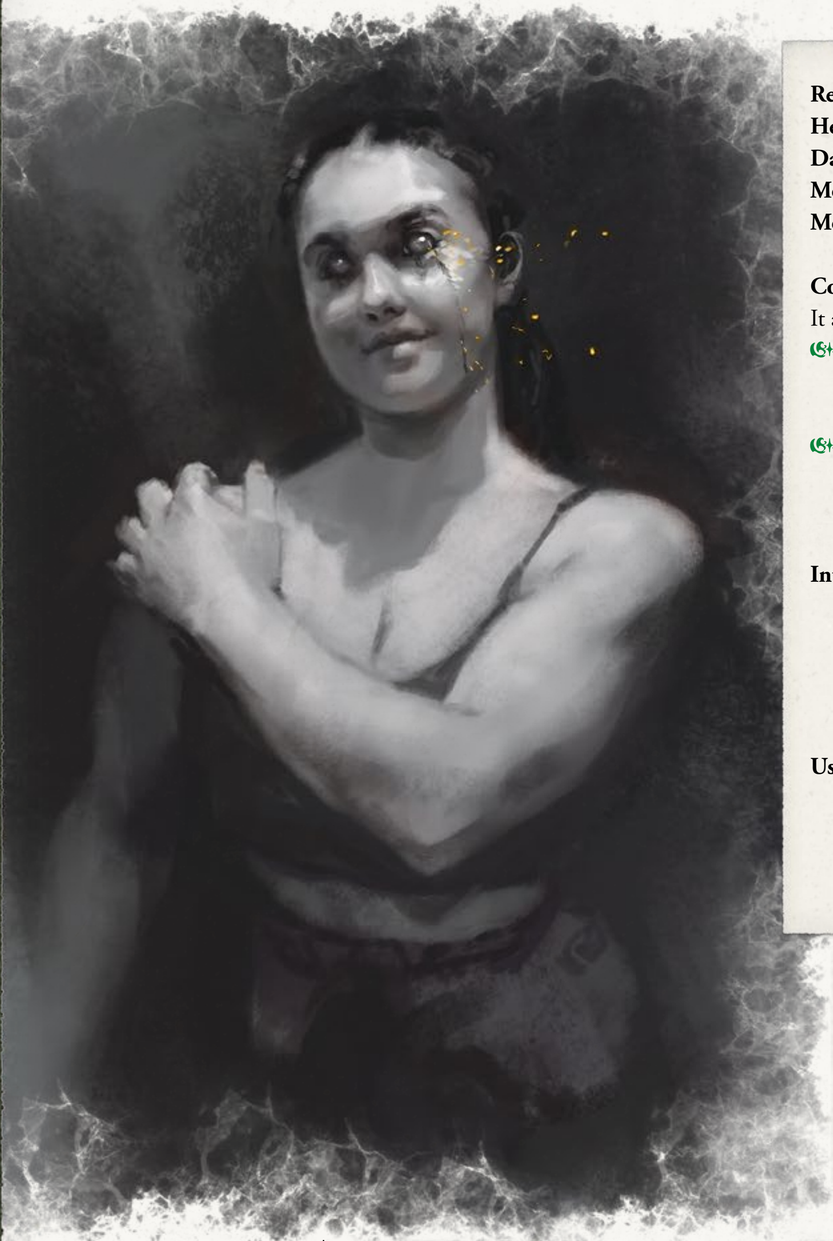
SKIN SHELL 3 (9)

GM intrusion: *When the character strikes the skin shell with a melee attack, the shock of hitting something as solid as a sack of sawdust causes them to drop their weapon.*

The Stranger, page 175
The Anglerfish, page 197

They look normal enough from a distance. Just like regular people, with names, jobs, and everything. But spend any time with one, and it's easy to see that something's off. They speak fluidly, but their eyes are glassy and empty, resembling those of an animal that's been stuffed and mounted by a taxidermist.

And that's exactly what skin shells are: victims of The Stranger (usually, The Anglerfish), their skin and hair harvested, stuffed with sawdust and cloves in human shape, and given a new faux life. In rare cases, newly taxidermized skin shells closely resemble the original victim. But usually, to those who knew the victim, a skin shell seems like a complete stranger.



Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress
Movement: Short
Modifications: Tasks to recall the original victim's life as level 1; perception tasks as level 7
Combat: A skin shell attacks with its bare fists.
It also has the following traits.

- *Feeling No Pain:* A skin shell can't be dazed or stunned by physical attacks and is immune to most poisons and diseases.
- *Hard to Drop:* If an attack would reduce a skin shell's health to 0, it does so only if the number rolled in the attack was an even number; otherwise, the skin shell is reduced to 1 point of health instead.

Interaction: A skin shell usually blends in, but if someone notices something off about one, it doesn't keep pretending. Instead, it leans into that uncanny valley, attempting to intensify through its speech and deeds the creeping sense that something about it isn't right, not quite human.

Use: Though not especially powerful, skin shells are hard to permanently dispatch without concentrated effort. Still, even a single determined PC is probably more than a match for a single skin shell. But a group would be another matter entirely.

SKIN SHELL NAMES

Skin shells usually have completely normal names, such as the following:

Sarah Baldwin, Daniel Rawlings, Isla Brown, David Thomson, Mia Wilson, Clive Smith, Anne Davies.

One of the first appearances of a skin shell (with the identity of Sarah Baldwin) in The Magnus Archives *podcast is in episode 28.*

> ARCHIVIST: Are you the same Sarah Baldwin that disappeared in Edinburgh in August 2006?
>
> SARAH BALDWIN: Some of her. Skin. A few memories. Not on the inside.
>
> —MAG 96: "Return to Sender"

THE TAKER OF LIGHT 6 (18)

White hair and milky white eyes sharply contrast with The Taker of Light's inky black robe that moves and shifts by itself.

The Taker of Light has passed from body to body down through the centuries, leaving the previous one a dried husk while acquiring a younger self already touched by The Dark in some fashion.

GM intrusion: *The Taker of Light steps into shadow and gets away.*

The Dark, page 171

Related Entity: The Dark
Health: 25
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Perception as level 9
Combat: The Taker of Light throws inky, freezing dust at up to three targets in immediate range, inflicting 3 points of Stress to those struck.

The Taker also has the following options as his action.

Consuming Darkness: A wave of screaming darkness resembling heavy fog rolls from The Taker's mouth, attacking a target within immediate range (up to once a day). If the target fails a Might defense roll, the darkness begins to consume them like acid, inflicting a serious wound each round. If the target fails three defense rolls on their turn before succeeding on three, either they are absorbed into The Dark or The Taker's consciousness passes into the body (as The Taker chooses).

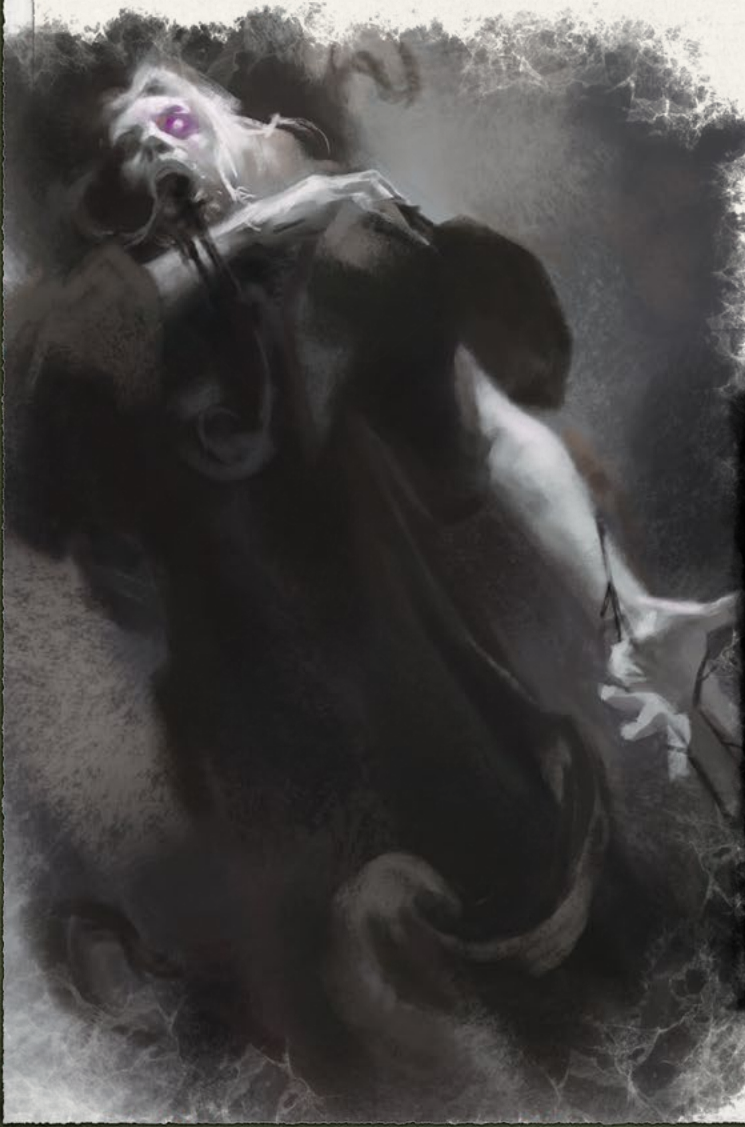
Entreat the Beast: The Taker summons a lightless beast to do his bidding (up to once a day). In addition, he can summon The Still and Lightless Beast (up to once a month).

Pray the Sandman: The Taker of Light sets The Sandman on a target in immediate range (up to once a month). The Sandman attacks the target sometime during the next few nights.

Shadowfall: Inky, freezing dust falls on all targets within short range (up to once each hour), inflicting 3 points of Stress to those struck. In addition, the area is filled with darkness for many minutes, blowing out lights already in the area and slowly dimming flashlights and other sources of light brought in from outside.

Interaction: A schemer born centuries ago, The Taker is an accomplished conversationalist when he wishes. But his ultimate goal is to complete the ritual known as the Extinguished Sun and plunge all of existence into eternal void.

Use: As a principal Avatar of The Dark, The Taker should instill fear and careful consideration in the PCs, because he's not a being that can be easily bested in combat. Still, he's slightly more fragile than other Avatars.



Something was . . . something was flowing out of his mouth. It looked like ink, but it flowed more like a heavy fog than any sort of liquid. It drips down his forearms and onto the floor, where it . . . it rolled towards Callum, climbing up the chair and oozing across the boy's body towards his face. It was moving slowly, and had just reached his chest. The roaring sound seemed to come as it convulsed out of the old man's mouth.

—MAG 73: "Police Lights"

Lightless beast, page 224

The Still and Lightless Beast, page 224

The Sandman, page 236

The Extinguished Sun, page 171

The Taker may be accompanied by one or more cultists of the Divine Host.

Cultist of the Divine Host, page 207

The Taker of Light's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Maxwell Rayner.*

THE TOME HOARDER 5 (15)

GM intrusion: *The Tome Hoarder whispers, "A treat for The Flesh," and the targeted character must succeed on a Might defense roll or take a serious injury as the meat of their body convulses and shifts.*

Her elderly and painfully thin head is clean shaven. Every visible square inch of her skin is tattooed with cramped Sanskrit text. If she is encountered in her home or place of business, death metal music blares from powerful speakers.

A paranormal practitioner, The Tome Hoarder has abilities that stem from a lifetime of collecting and reading eldritch books. In fact, her continued undead existence is a result of partially binding herself to a powerful tome of the trapped dead.

Related Entity: All, channeled through her lore and paranormal book collection

Health: 15

Damage Inflicted: 2 points of Stress

Movement: Short

Modifications: Performs sorcery as level 6

Combat: The Tome Hoarder channels the power of various Entities against a foe. Options include:

After the End: If brought to 0 health, The Tome Hoarder turns to so much blowing parchment dust. However, she can manifest physically again in a couple of days. The only way to destroy her is to find her page in the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*, remove that page, and burn it.

Page Turner: If she defeats a target, she can perform an eight-hour ritual that kills and binds that person's spirit to a newly created page in the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*.

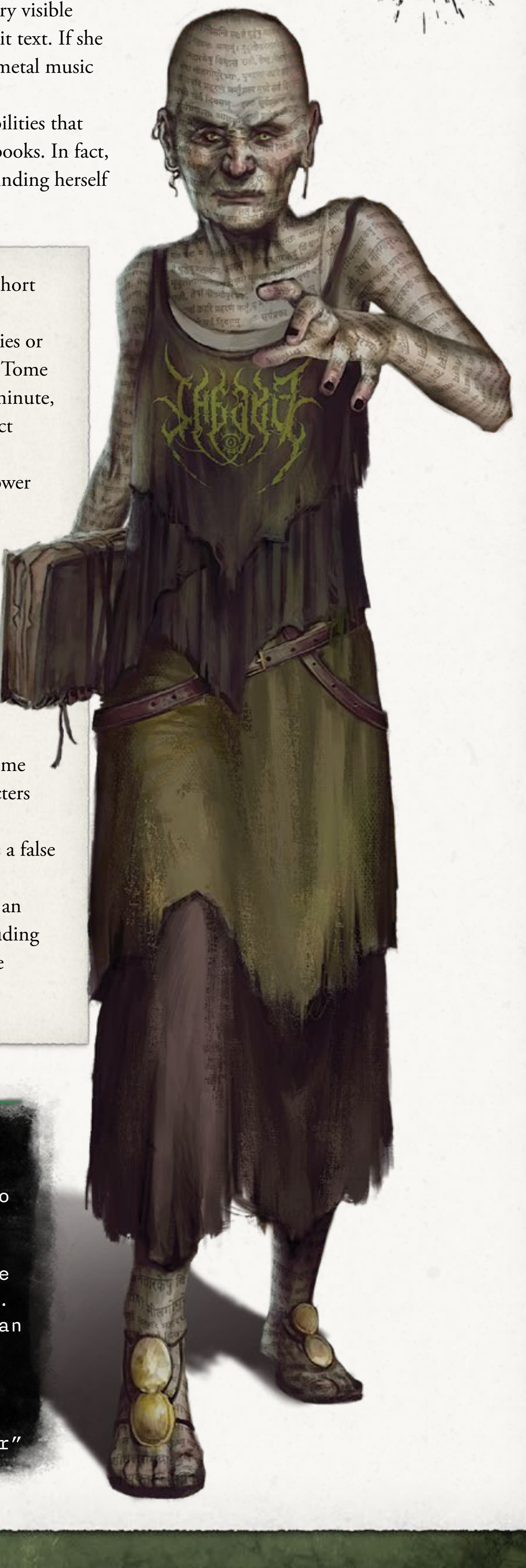
Plunge Into The Vast: A target within short range who fails an Intellect defense roll momentarily feels as if they're falling through empty sky and gains 3 points of Stress.

Spiraling Confusion: Targets within short range who fail an Intellect defense roll become confused and turn on their allies or take some other action desired by The Tome Hoarder. The confusion lasts for one minute, or until a target succeeds on an Intellect defense roll on their turn.

Interaction: The Tome Hoarder seeks power without becoming a servitor of the Entities. She's eager to acquire more paranormal books and will negotiate to that end. She's also proud of her collection and could offer to show a book or two to an interested collector who doesn't know any better.

Use: PCs that require specialized knowledge might stumble into The Tome Hoarder's shop or library. If the characters opt for conflict (or she does), she's defeatable—but that's soon revealed as a false achievement when she comes back.

The Tome Hoarder is usually found near an assortment of paranormal books, including a couple of Leitners and, of course, the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead*.



Catalogue of the Trapped Dead, *page 270*

Leitners, page 267

The Tome Hoarder's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Mary Keay.*

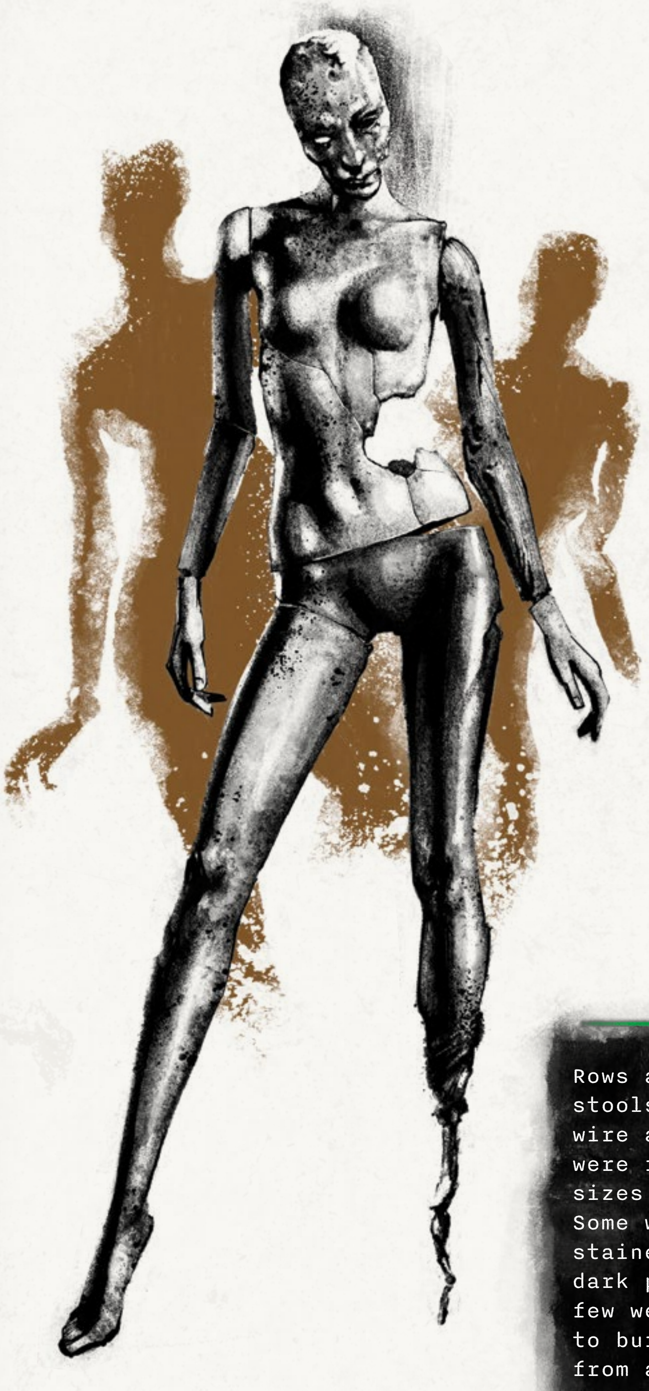
The Tome Hoarder and The Book Collector are two sides of the same coin, and if they ever met, they'd have much to talk about.

> She very deliberately held the book in those shadows for a few seconds and then handed it back to me. [. . .] I lifted it to have a closer look, and as I did I heard something clatter lightly onto the floor. I looked down to see bones. Small animal bones, from what I can tell, but each one was slightly bent and warped into shapes that bones should not form.
>
> —MAG 4: "Page Turner"

UNCANNY MANNEQUIN 4 (12) 1

Brought to lifelike animation through long rituals, uncanny mannequins are composed of base materials often reclaimed from refuse. Many only vaguely resemble people, though some can be disguised in a harvested skin and sent out to accomplish specific tasks on behalf of someone like The Ringmaster or other agent of The Stranger.

The Ringmaster, page 235
The Stranger, page 175



Related Entity: The Stranger
Health: 15
Damage Inflicted: 3 points of Stress
Movement: Short
Modifications: Disguise as level 7 when freezing in place or impersonating a living thing
Combat: An uncanny mannequin is cruelly capable when armed with a razor-sharp knife, ideal for skinning or decapitation.

Mannequins also have the following traits and abilities.

Freeze in Place: An uncanny mannequin freezes in place, appearing as nothing more than a large sculpture or waxwork. In this state, the mannequin can't move or act for at least an hour after going inert, unless attacked. While it's frozen, treat it as a level 5 object.

Splinter: A splinter left behind in the damaged target's flesh reduces their recovery rolls (and any other healing effects) by 1 point. The target can remove the splinter as their action with a successful Speed roll.

Wear a Skin: The uncanny mannequin, if supplied with a harvested skin by another agent of The Stranger, can assume a role in society to accomplish a specific task, such as impersonating an individual to unsettle and slowly horrify those who used to know the victim (whose skin was harvested to enable the swap).

Interaction: An uncanny mannequin doesn't have much self-awareness or self-preservation, but instead enacts the orders of its creator. However, when wearing a skin as a disguise, they gain some awareness, possibly enough to feel fear and horror at their own circumstance.

Use: An encounter with one or two uncanny mannequins, while stressful to the mind, is something PCs can reasonably expect to survive. If many are gathered, especially in the company of an Avatar of The Stranger, the PCs should bargain, flee, or do anything else than engage in a straight-up fight.

> Rows and rows of old and broken stools stood before crude frames of wire and wood. Sat on each stool were figures of all shapes and sizes. None of them were human. Some were wood themselves, old, and stained with rot. Some were a shiny, dark plastic or porcelain white. A few were cloth and hessian, stuffed to bursting and leaking sawdust from a dozen places. All of them were featureless, and moved with a jerky motion like nothing I had seen outside of my dreams.
>
> —MAG 87: "The Uncanny Valley"

GM intrusion: *The uncanny mannequin folds, deforms and breaks its artificial body to escape, slipping through an opening too small for the character to follow.*

VAMPIRE 4 (12) 1

Vampires never speak or even utter a single sound. Instead, they psychically impart their thoughts so smoothly and innocuously that people don't realize they've been selected as prey.

The Hunt, page 173

Related Entity: The Hunt
Health: 18
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Deception and persuasion as level 6
Combat: Vampires bite.
Vampires flinch from flame, taking double damage from fiery attacks unless they have fed in the last few hours.
Vampires also have the following traits.

- *Psychic Communication:* Vampires can make themselves understood with absolute clarity without speaking. Targets must succeed on a difficulty 6 perception task to realize they're the target of unusual communication and that the vampire isn't speaking verbally.
- *Hypnotic Gaze:* A target that meets the vampire's short-range gaze and fails an Intellect defense roll is stunned, losing their next turn. For the next ten minutes, the affected target does not forcibly resist the vampire (other than attempting another Intellect defense roll each round to break free of the effect), and the vampire can suggest actions to the target (including allowing the vampire to feed upon them).
- *Feed:* A helpless target—or one affected by the vampire's "hypnosis"—suffers a serious injury every minute the vampire feeds on them. The vampire's gut grows large and bloated as it feeds, and it loses its vulnerability to flame for the next few hours.

Interaction: A vampire pretends to be normal, all in aid of separating potential prey from others to feed on them in the privacy of their lair (which is usually a regular, if a bit unkempt, apartment or house).
Use: Though shocking, gruesome, and potentially lethal for a lone character who doesn't realize what a vampire is, one of these monsters could be defeated by a group, or even a single dedicated and prepared hunter of such beings.

GM intrusion: *The vampire breaks through a barrier, a restraint, or some other containment the character thought was keeping it at bay.*

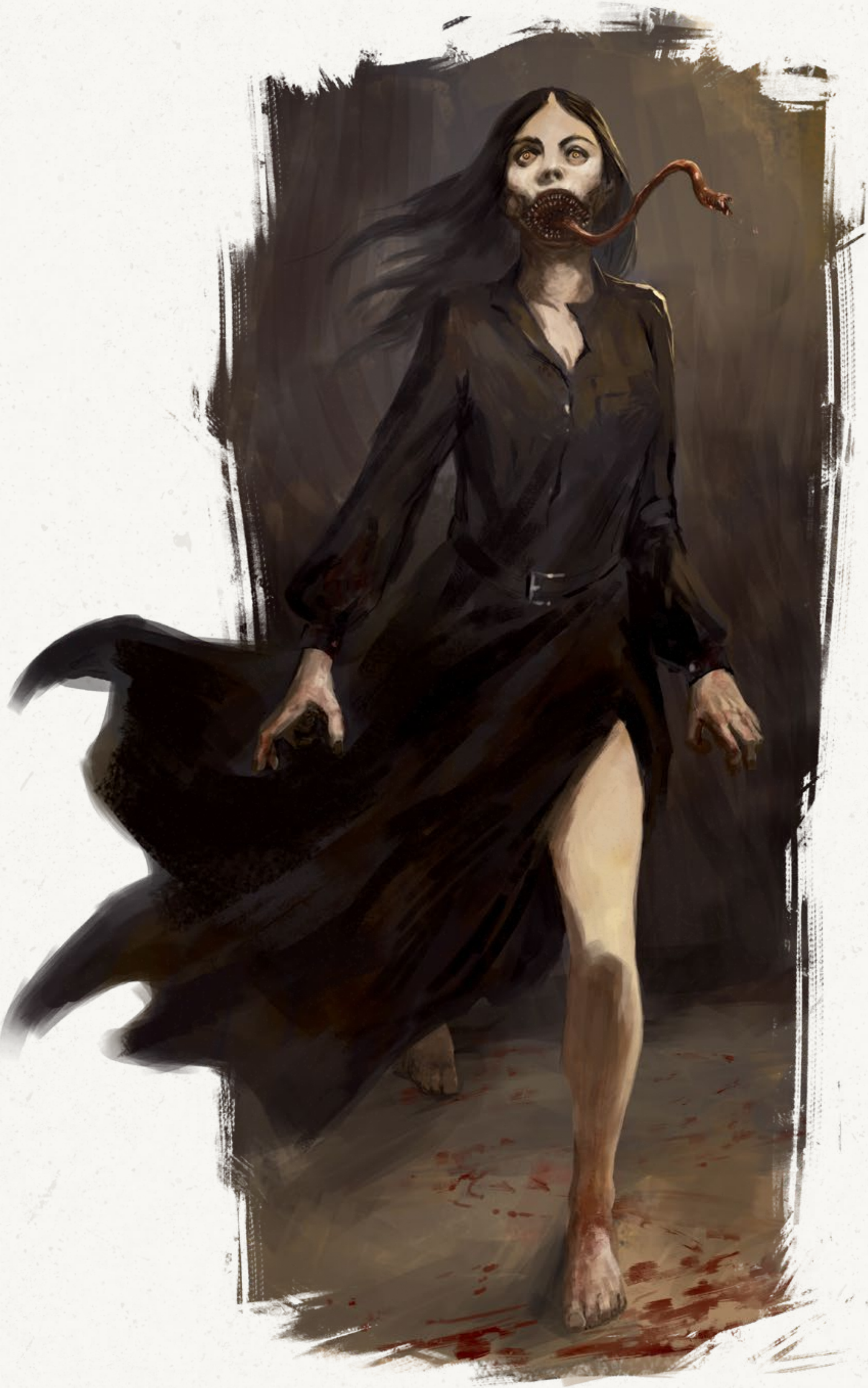
A common misconception regarding vampires is the belief that they cannot go out during the day. They can.

> It opened its mouth for what I then realised was the first time since we met it, and I could see nothing inside save for a dozen long, thick, pointed teeth like a shark. In one fluid movement it plunged those teeth into my brother's neck and tore out a great chunk of flesh. Blood started to spurt from Nigel's spasming body, as Sylvia McDonald's throat began to twitch. Its jaw detached and a long tubular tongue about the thickness of my forearm snaked out of its throat and clamped onto the gushing wound. There was an awful slurping sound, the first noise I'd ever really heard the creature make, as the tongue sucked the blood from my brother's throat. I just lay there watching as its stomach began to distend and swell, the now bulbous belly straining against the black dress it wore.
>
> —MAG 10: "Vampire Killer"

VAMPIRE NAMES

Vampires assume names that don't stand out, such as:

Sylvia McDonald, Robert Arden, Elisabetta Bianchi, Randall Marsh, Juliet Schuman, Eugene Briggs, Vera Goodman, Philip Kain.



THE VAMPIRE HUNTER 5 (15)

The Vampire Hunter's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Trevor Herbert.*

The Hunt, page 173

The Entities, page 166

His lean, athletic frame is at odds with the advanced age suggested by his white hair and beard. It's clear he can handle himself in a fight. The various firearms, edged weapons, and other gear secured about his person only reinforce that view.

Despite his title, The Vampire Hunter goes after any sort of monster, the love of the chase burning in his eyes. That intensity sometimes blinds him to the fact that his quarry is innocent, not a monster. Not given to introspection, he doesn't let his misjudgments keep him from the next hunt.

Related Entity: The Hunt

Health: 18

Damage Inflicted: Serious injury

Movement: Short

Modifications: Tracking those touched by the Entities, initiative, and Intellect defense tasks as level 8

Combat: The Vampire Hunter typically knifes his target twice as his action, preferring to surprise his prey (and thus ease his first attack by two steps).

He also has the following attacks and traits.

Garrote: The Vampire Hunter makes a melee attack that deals no damage but, if successful, collars the target with a constricting wire loop. The affected target can't breathe or speak, suffering a serious injury at the end of each of their turns that they fail a Might roll as their action to break or snip the wire.

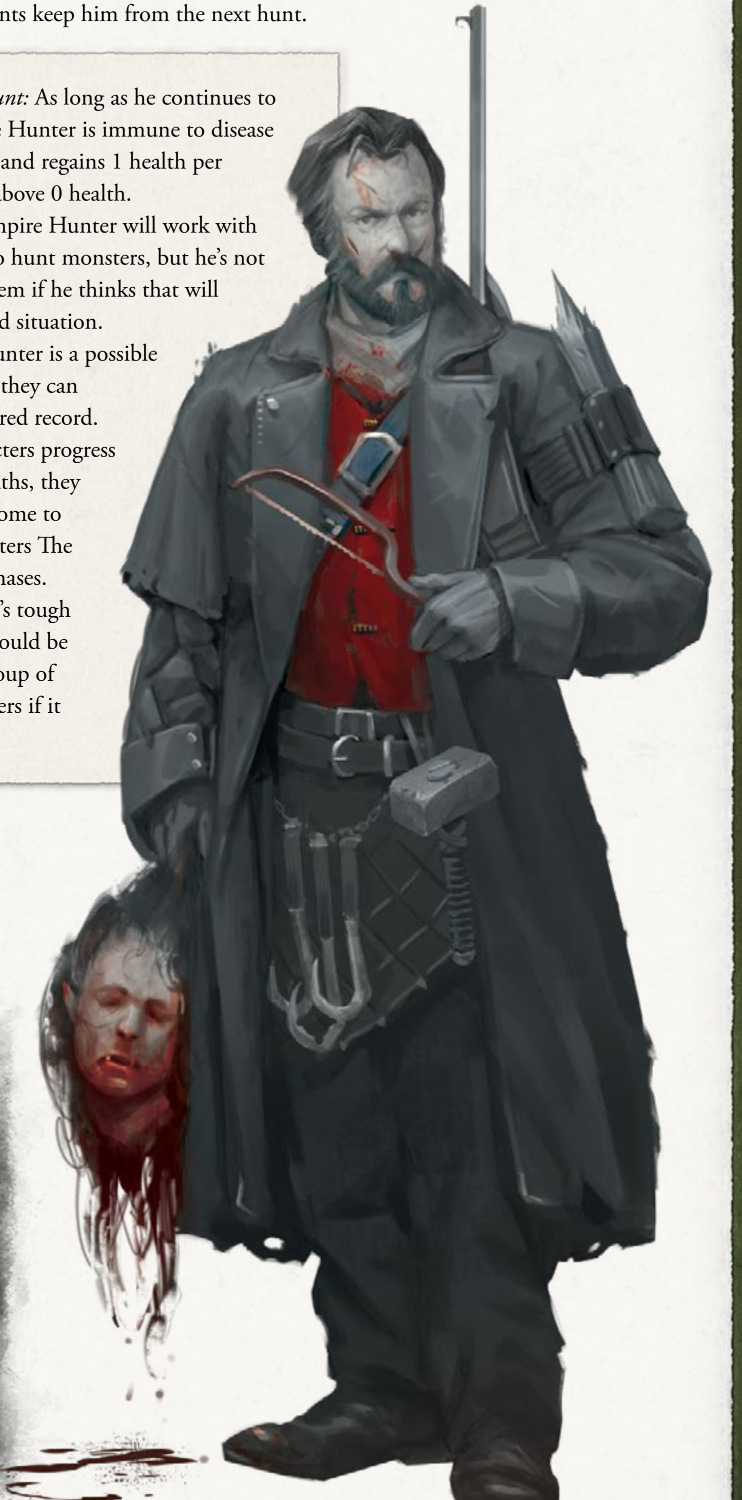
Hidden Weapon: The Vampire Hunter pulls out a previously hidden weapon—such as a short-range throwing knife—and makes an immediate attack as part of another action.

Vitality of the Hunt: As long as he continues to hunt, The Vampire Hunter is immune to disease (including cancer) and regains 1 health per round while he is above 0 health.

Interaction: The Vampire Hunter will work with others who want to hunt monsters, but he's not above betraying them if he thinks that will save his life in a bad situation.

Use: The Vampire Hunter is a possible ally for the PCs, if they can get over his checkered record. However, as characters progress down their own paths, they might eventually come to resemble the monsters The Vampire Hunter chases. If that happens, he's tough and resilient, but could be dispatched by a group of competent characters if it comes to it.

GM intrusion: *A vampire (page 242) that The Vampire Hunter failed to kill targets the character for having associated with the person who tried to kill them.*



```
I've often wondered if I was mad, you know.
I mean, no one else seems to have seen these
things and I've found plenty across my life.
Perhaps I just got the smell of them. Like,
no one else ever really got away, and my
early escape from Sylvia McDonald gave me
a sense that could pick them out. There's a
sharpness to them. They're hunters. But over
the years, I've become a hunter as well, and
maybe predators recognise each other. All I
know is these days I can almost smell the
blood coming off them. That's not to say I
can't be wrong though. I can be very wrong
indeed.
```

—MAG 56: "Children of the Night"

WATCHER'S HUSK 4 (12) 1

Watcher's husks are undead librarians, shuffling through lightless, forgotten depositories of lore from previous centuries and millennia. They were once Avatars of The Eye. But The Archivist's mantle passed on to another. Now, watcher's husks look after the ruins housing the occult knowledge they once tended, deathlessly guarding it from intruders.

The Eye, page 172

The Archivist, page 198

Related Entity: The Eye
Health: 12
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Perception as level 8
Combat: A watcher's husk batters with an undead limb.

A husk may use one or more of the following abilities as their action:

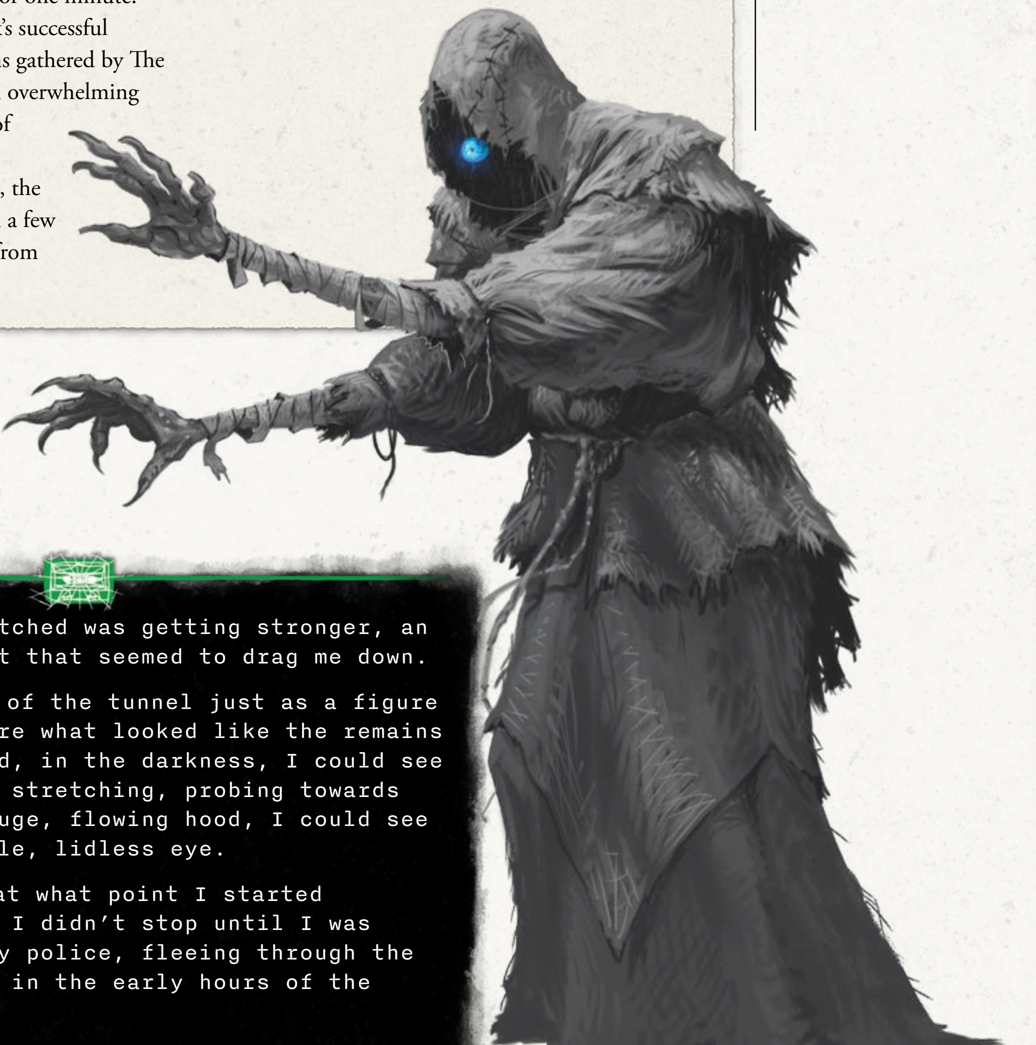
- *Heavy Gaze:* The target of the husk's concentrated gaze must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or the weight of the attention hinders their physical actions for one minute.
- *Remember the Past:* The husk's successful touch pours centuries of visions gathered by The Eye into the target's head in an overwhelming torrent, giving them 3 points of Stress.
- *Watchful Vitality:* If defeated, the husk may return to undeath in a few days unless its eye is removed from its skull.

Interaction: A watcher's husk doesn't speak. It discharges its duty of guardianship without hesitation or true consciousness, having been reduced to a mere vessel of eternal vigilance.
Use: Watcher's husks are frightening foes but can be defeated by a group of determined characters. The troubling thing about finding one is more about the realization characters may gain of how long the Entities have been active.

Husks may be encountered guarding a location from which one or more paranormal books or scrolls can be obtained, possibly including a Leitner.

GM intrusion: *The character meets the husk's gaze. On a failed Intellect defense roll, they are cursed with bad luck (increasing their GM intrusion range to 1–2 on a d20) for one day, or until the curse can be lifted by an Avatar or dabbler (page 209).*

Leitners, page 267

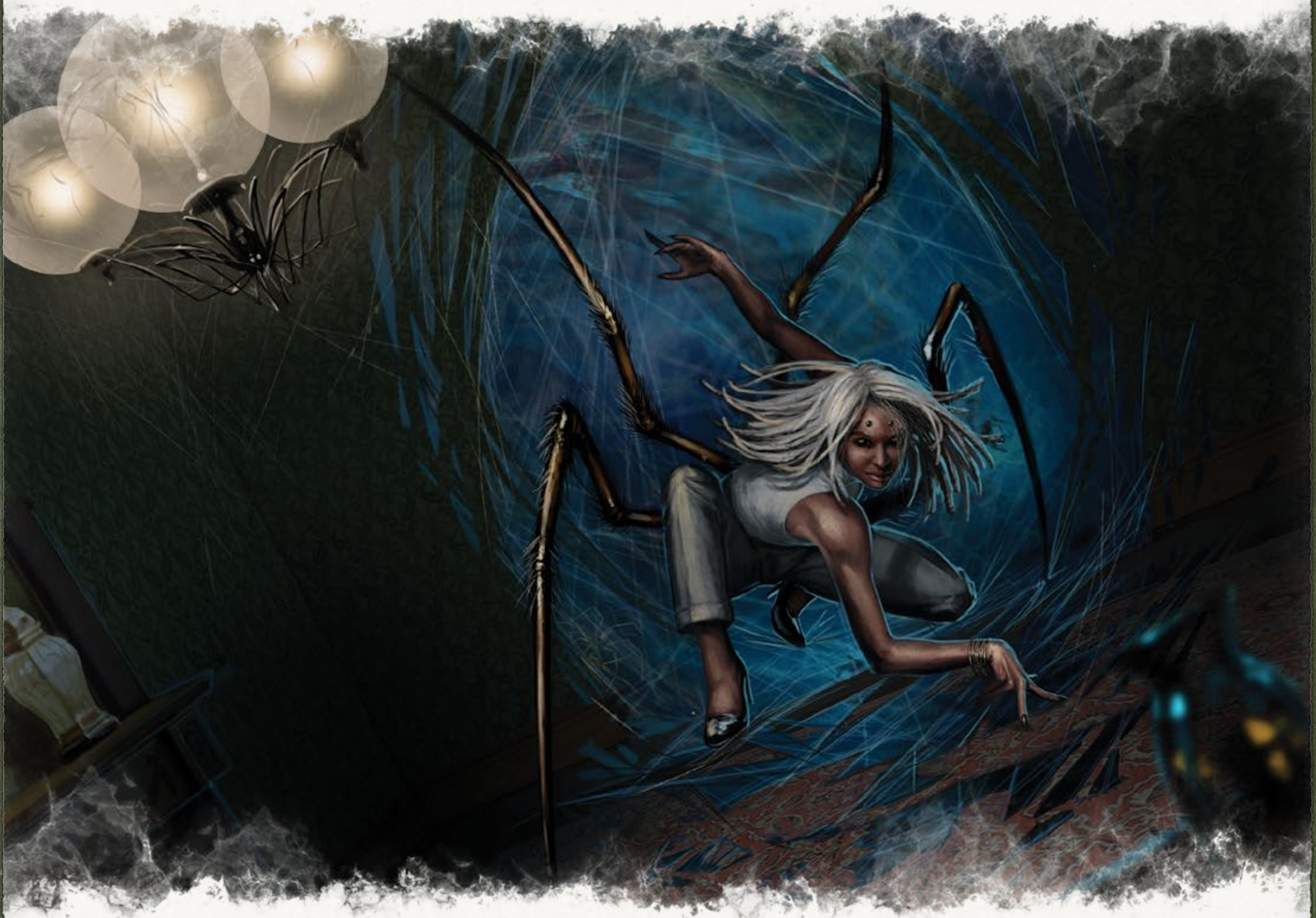


```
The sense of being watched was getting stronger, an
almost physical weight that seemed to drag me down.

 I reached the mouth of the tunnel just as a figure
came into view. It wore what looked like the remains
of an ancient robe and, in the darkness, I could see
long, spindly fingers stretching, probing towards
me. From within its huge, flowing hood, I could see
nothing except a single, lidless eye.

 I, I, I don't know at what point I started
screaming, but I know I didn't stop until I was
restrained by military police, fleeing through the
streets of Alexandria in the early hours of the
morning.

                              —MAG 53: "Crusader"
```

THE WEAVER 7 (21)

This rail-thin Black woman has bleached-blonde hair, which doesn't quite cover a mass of white, weblike thread crisscrossing one temple. She walks strangely, like her vintage trousers don't fit right, bending her knees at odd angles and holding herself stiffly. Her fingers sometimes writhe like spider legs. In some light, she seems to have more than two eyes; other times, she appears as a gargantuan spider.

The ultimate schemer, The Weaver executes intricate plans that unfold gradually, potentially leading to world-altering consequences.



The Weaver's name in The Magnus Archives *podcast is Annabelle Cane.*

> With a sudden, jerky motion they drew their heads back, then slammed them into the mirrored window, shattering it all at once. I wanted to run, but I couldn't will my body to move.
>
> I just stood there, watching the blood run down from the cuts in their foreheads, as Annabelle began to climb through the broken window, her limbs moving and reaching, slowly and deliberately. The others didn't move a muscle as she crawled over them, then over the floor towards me. When she was about a foot away from me, she drew herself up to her full height.
>
> —MAG 69: "Thought for the Day"

> Of course, that's not the real crux of the free will question that's bothering you at the moment, is it? I think that one probably comes down to whether or not you're choosing to continue reading this statement out loud. You didn't mean to, did you? No, I'm sure you told Basira and Melanie that you were going to glance it over and report back. Perhaps they asked you if you were going to record it and you shook your head. "Maybe later." That sounds like the sort of thing you'd say. But think about it, John, when's the last time you were able to read a statement quietly to yourself without instinctively hitting RECORD and speaking it aloud? Is it just instinct, habit? Or is it a compulsion, a string pulled by the Ceaseless Watcher or the Mother-of-Puppets?
>
> —MAG 147: "Weaver"

GM intrusion: *The character's hands involuntarily climb up their body and begin choking them, dealing damage each round until the character can escape the trance.*

The Web, page 176

Related Entity: The Web
Health: 21
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short; short when climbing
Modifications: Deception and persuasion as level 9
Combat: The Weaver channels paranormal energy against a foe. Options include:

Puppeteer's Trance: All targets in immediate range who fail an Intellect defense roll fall into a trance for ten minutes. Entranced targets stand unmoving until they succeed on an Intellect defense roll to end the effect early, or until The Weaver suffers damage. Afterward, they don't remember the event, but they may take on a new idea or unconscious habit implanted by The Weaver.

Alternatively, The Weaver can use her action to directly control the physical actions of entranced targets however she wishes, such as impelling them to:

- Dance
- Operate machinery or technology
- Repeatedly slam their heads against a window

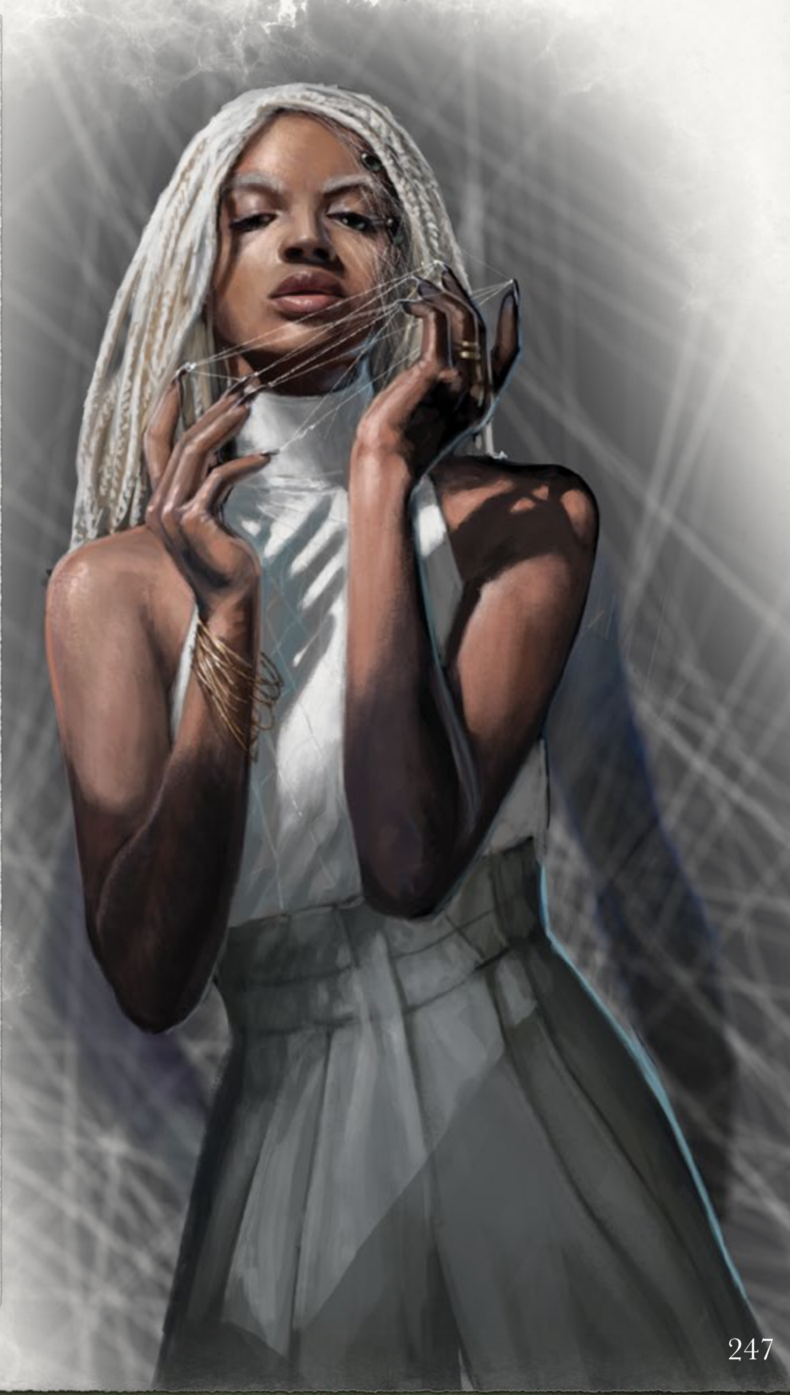
Each time a controlled target damages themselves, they may immediately make an Intellect defense roll to escape.

Scuttling Spies: If The Weaver wants to know what's happening somewhere, spiders turn up there within the hour. Unless they're all found and eliminated, The Weaver knows what's happening in that location.

Webbed Regeneration: The Weaver regains 2 points of health per round, even when at 0 health.

Interaction: The Weaver can seem entirely amicable and may work with someone who opposes Entities other than The Web.

Use: The characters are likely to encounter The Weaver several times without the situation devolving into violence, especially if she wants something from them. But if they prove to her that she doesn't need them, The Weaver could prove their end.



CHAPTER 13

ARTEFACTS AND BOOKS

> I began to think hard about the world, about my place within it, and about fear. About the figure of the merchant, the trader who deals in strange and dangerous goods, how it can be found in so many myths and fables, dealing in second-hand nightmares. And how rarely the merchant themself is ever punished in those stories.
>
> I would love to pretend that it was out of self-preservation that I committed to my new trade, but that would be mostly a lie. To tell you the truth, I got a real kick out of playing my role. To think of myself as a purveyor of curses, walking softly through the most dangerous edges of reality so that the rich and arrogant could buy their own doom.
>
> —MAG 181: "Ignorance"

The Entities, page 166
Books, page 267

Cursed objects, each aligned with one or more of the Entities, are scattered across the world like traps hungry for the fear of their next victim. It's lucky they're relatively rare because they're almost always malevolent. A few are merely unsettling, most are terrifying, and many ultimately prove deadly.

Still, someone with patience and luck can gain a bit of power from many of these objects, obtaining a paranormal ability, a ward against enemies, or some other benefit—though each use is a risk.

The two main forms these cursed objects take are artefacts and books.

ARTEFACTS

Rituals, page 168
Gorilla skin, page 259
The Stranger, page 175

Some artefacts are entirely baleful. Others provide just enough benefit to outweigh the risks of keeping them around. Several are cherished heirlooms for followers of a particular Entity, slated to one day be used to enact an Entity's ritual, such as the gorilla skin (linked to The Stranger).

FINDING, IDENTIFYING, AND USING ARTEFACTS

Characters could find an artefact while on an investigation. For instance, a mysterious old box might be in the attic where someone disappeared. Another could have been stolen from a museum of antiquities. PCs might recover one in the possession of a defeated foe. Or perhaps the characters are "gifted" one by an acquaintance who wishes them ill. Sometimes artefacts can even be purchased from a specialized source, such as from The Artefact Dealer.

After the characters find an artefact, identifying it is a separate Intellect task. The GM sets the difficulty of the task, but it is usually equal to the artefact's level. Identifying it takes at least ten minutes, but could take hours or even days. If the PCs can't identify an artefact, they can bring it to an expert to be identified and/or possibly traded or sold.

Characters can attempt to use an artefact that has not been identified, which is usually an Intellect task equal to the artefact's level + 2. Failure might mean that the PCs trigger the artefact's fear, if it seems fitting.

Once characters identify an artefact, they can use it as described in the item's entry, assuming it has a positive use. Many, however, only have a sinister effect, not so much used by a character as endured or dealt with one way or another. At best, a PC might use such an artefact by setting it as a trap for someone else.

Even if PCs identify an artefact, they almost never learn what its fear is unless the fear is triggered.

Attempting to identify an artefact could expose a character to its primary effect, as some artefacts (such as the slaughter knife) potentially affect those who merely look at or handle them.

DESTROYING ARTEFACTS

While many artefacts might appear to be destroyed when exposed to sufficient force or conditions (burning a book, for example), for the vast majority of them, this isn't the case. The power of the Entities ensures that they, in fact, survive, only to be discovered by someone else at a later date. Truly destroying an artefact usually involves supernatural means, such as a special ritual or the power of another artefact. Discovering the means to destroy an artefact permanently takes a great deal of research and probably some experimentation, and the process to destroy the artefact is itself dangerous.

HOW ARTEFACT STATS WORK

Level: Every artefact has a level. Usually, the level sets the difficulty for any roll an owner must make in regard to the artefact, beginning with the Intellect roll to identity it, but also any defense rolls to avoid becoming a victim of the object. Some artefacts indicate exceptions.

Related Entity: The Entity (or in some cases, multiple Entities) each artefact is linked to adds an additional dimension to the item. GMs can use this link to add flavor, abilities, or quirks to an item. For example, an item linked to The Corruption might cause nearby food to rot, or an item related to The Flesh might bleed now and again.

Stress: This entry indicates the amount of Stress a PC takes when encountering, understanding, and/or using the artefact. Unlike when PCs encounter monsters for the first time, the Stress indicated for a given situation (such as "1 with each use" or "3 on understanding how to use") is automatic and not subject to being negated with a defense roll.

Description: The main body of each entry describes what the artefact looks like and how it reacts when studied, handled, or, sometimes, just looked at. This is information that someone who successfully identifies an artefact can usually discover (unlike the fear).

Unless indicated otherwise, if an artefact is given away, sold, or abandoned, the possessor usually suffers no further harm, at least directly. Scars and mental trauma could well persist.

Fear: If a character rolls a triggered GM intrusion (usually 1 on a d20 roll, or potentially a larger range if Horror Mode or other conditions are active), the indicated effect afflicts the character or something related as dictated by the situation. Alternatively, the GM could use the suggested triggered intrusion—or a variation—as a standard GM intrusion at any time a character has the artefact.

The Artefact Dealer, page 199

Slaughter knife, page 262

Horror Mode, page 122

GM Intrusions, page 120

ARTEFACTS

- Blood money pouch
- Boatswain's call
- Calliope
- Camera of occultation
- Chelicerae
- Coffin of The Buried
- Dark star
- Dark wardrobe
- Death's game piece
- Entombing crate
- Flesh grinder
- Fractal pot
- Gorilla skin
- Lonely painting
- Mirror of beholding
- Patterned rug
- Pestilent scalpel
- Rock eye
- Slaughter gun
- Slaughter knife
- Syringe of Dr. Snow
- Thrumming cocoon
- Web lighter
- Web table
- Web tape recorder
- Yushanka chatbot

MAKING YOUR OWN ARTEFACTS AND BOOKS

Although the items in this chapter are many, for your own investigations, you'll likely want to create your own. Not all of your investigations will involve books or artefacts, but each story that does might call for its own items as needed for the situation.

For example, the adventure in chapter 15, "The Resurrection Mound," offers its own new book (*The Queen and the Egg Sac*) and artefact (the corrupt egg sac). They're very specific to that scenario, but they were easy to create. They just needed a level (choose any from 1 to 10, but most are probably around 4 or 5), a related Entity (usually obvious), a note for how much Stress they give users or readers (usually 2 or 3), an explanation of what it means to read or use them, and a fear effect. There are no right or wrong answers here—books and artefacts can be as powerful, as dangerous, or as useless as you wish. Let the players beware!

This also means you can change the items in this chapter any way you wish. If you want to use the rock eye in your campaign, but you want it to cause those that meet its gaze to go into a maniacal fit, just make note of it. No need to change anything else about the rock eye—your alteration won't change the level, the Stress, or anything else.

It's worth noting that as chapter 11 suggests, you can use as much or as little of the story from the podcast as you want. For example, the adventure in chapter 16, "Liquify," uses *The Boneturner's Tale,* but the book's background and current whereabouts are entirely different. And if you'd prefer to use that book closer to how the podcast uses it, just change the book in the adventure to something new—*A Twist of Flesh*, maybe—and perhaps give it a lower level and Stress effect if you want, and you're done.

A SELECTION OF ARTEFACTS

BLOOD MONEY POUCH

> When I first stumbled across one of the cursed objects, I recognised what it was immediately. It took the form of a leather pouch, filled with 1888 Morgan silver dollars. It was aligned to The Slaughter and . . . well, let us call it "blood money" and talk no more of the grisly details. Selling them, well, it went very badly for the buyer . . .
>
> —MAG 181: "Ignorance"

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Slaughter

Stress: 3 upon understanding how to use the pouch (or recognizing the effect of a coin given to another or how the pouch has been affecting them); 2 with each use

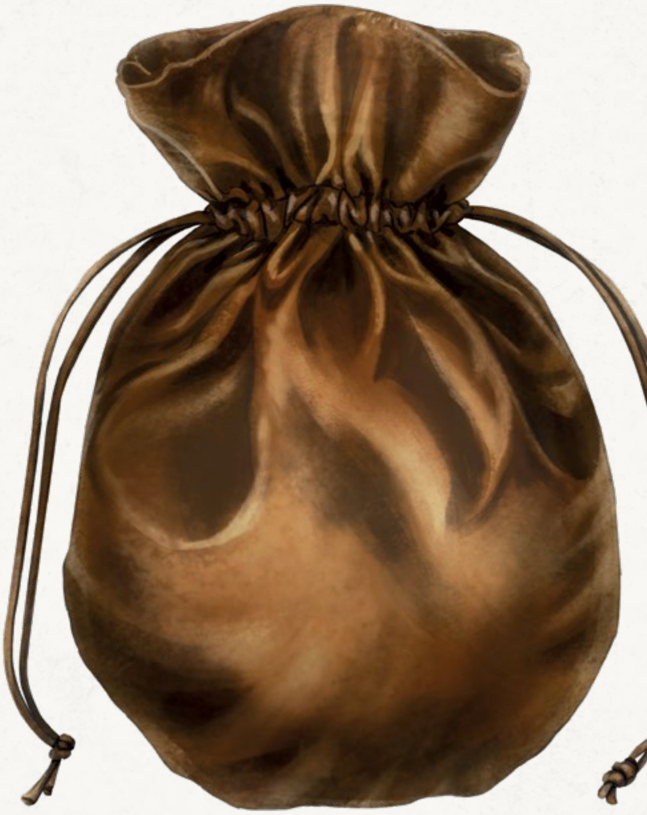
Description: If a coin from this leather pouch filled with 1888 Morgan silver dollars is given to someone else—perhaps as a gift, in payment for a service, or successfully hidden among their belongings—the recipient must succeed on an Intellect defense roll each night they have the coin. On a failed roll, they sleepwalk sometime during the night, attempting something grisly.

The sleepwalker can make another Intellect defense roll each time someone calls their name or asks them to stop. If successful, they wake up but don't remember anything. Otherwise they finish the grisly activity, if they can, and return to bed, even if seriously wounded. They wake with no memory of what they've done, though any damage they suffered tells a different tale.

If the coin recipient gives away the coin, they're spared further direct ill effects, but the new recipient gains them. If a coin recipient perishes, the coin reappears back in the blood money pouch after a few days if not claimed by someone else first.

d6	Grisly Activity
1	Sleepwalker attempts to remove the face of the nearest living creature with a handy implement.
2	Sleepwalker attempts to stealthily waylay the nearest stranger, returning home with the victim's tongue if successful, which they hide under their bed.
3	Sleepwalker attempts to exsanguinate and drink the blood of the nearest living creature.
4	Sleepwalker attempts to murder the nearest living creature and hang them up like a game animal to be slaughtered, possibly cooking some choice cuts before returning to bed.
5	Sleepwalker commandeers a vehicle and attempts a series of hit-and-runs of random pedestrians.
6	Sleepwalker breaks every mirror they can find nearby, gathers the shards in a pitcher or similar container, and "drinks" them, taking a serious injury.

Fear: The pouch owner is affected as if they were given a coin until they relinquish the pouch.



BOATSWAIN'S CALL

> The mate reached down and took the old brass whistle from his neck. He pressed it to his lips, and blew. I have never heard a whistle sound like that. It was shrill, so high and piercing that I felt my hair stand on end, but it also seemed distant. Like I was hearing it from far, far away. I don't know how long he blew that boatswain's call for, but by the end, I realized we were surrounded by thick sea smoke. We should have been far too far south for it, but it rolled and billowed around the lifeboat, obscuring the tundra. No one said a word, but I could have sworn a few of my shipmates were crying.
>
> —MAG 33: "Boatswain's Call"

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Lonely

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding how to use the whistle; 1 with each use

Description: Blowing on this antique nautical whistle, made of tarnished brass with a bulbous chamber at one end, summons an area of rolling, heavy fog about 3 miles (5 km) in radius for one hour. Visibility in the fog is reduced to immediate range.

Clown doll, page 206

The Lonely, page 174

Anyone alone in the fog (separated by at least a long distance from everyone else) is banished into The Lonely on a failed Intellect defense roll. Those banished find themselves wandering completely alone in a misted, muted, mirror reflection of reality. They take 1 point of Stress each hour they fail an Intellect defense roll. They can attempt an Intellect-based task each minute they spend searching for a way out. On a success, they appear within a few yards to a few miles of where they were lost.

Fear: The user loses track of their allies and risks becoming alone in the fog.

CALLIOPE

> I walked slowly towards the old steam organ. It was bright red and in excellent condition except for a thick layer of dust. There was a small brass plaque simply reading "The Calliaphone." The brass pipes that stuck out from the top still shone faintly under the dust, and I noticed that there was writing, carved onto the cover of the keyboard. It read: "Be still, for there is strange music."
>
> —MAG 24: "Strange Music"

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Stranger

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding how to use the steam organ (or realizing the effects it has been having); 1 with each use

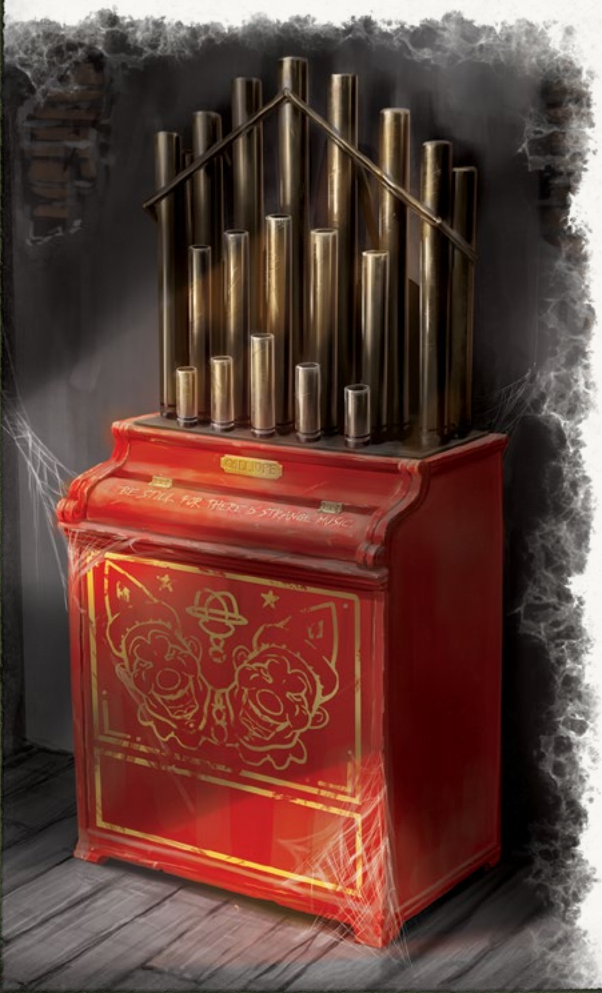
Description: When a performer plays this antique calliope steam organ and succeeds on a difficulty 1 performance task to play a particular song or melody (or evoke a particular mood), they can choose one of the following effects. If the performer doesn't realize the organ is anything out of the ordinary (or fails their performance task), the Circus Clown option is chosen on their behalf, targeting an ally of the performer.

- *Circus Clown:* A nearby toy is animated and afflicts someone chosen by the performer. The animate toy is a clown doll or has the stats and murderous nature of one.
- *Crowd of Strangers:* The blare of the organ alienates listeners within long range (up to once per day). On a failed Intellect defense roll, listeners (other than the performer and their chosen allies) act like strangers to themselves for one hour, usually in unpleasant ways: laughing and cheering when witnessing brutality, committing theft, and generally acting like utter arses verging on sociopathy.

Affected listeners can attempt an Intellect defense roll each minute (or each round, if their behavior is called out by others) to shake off the effect early.

- *Strange Control:* Someone chosen by the performer within long range who hears the tune and fails an Intellect defense roll must act as the performer wishes for the next hour. The controlled listener can attempt an Intellect defense roll each minute (and each time they take damage) to shake off the control.
- *Thrilling Shriek:* The shriek of the organ thrills listeners, granting those within long range an asset they can use for any one task they choose within one hour of hearing the tune (up to once per day). However, Horror Mode is triggered, or if it's already active, the range increases by 1 until Horror Mode ends.

Fear: The player or owner of the calliope becomes the target of the Circus Clown effect.


CALLIOPE
BE STILL FOR THERE'S STRANGE MUSIC

CAMERA OF OCCULTATION

> So I began to plan for my . . . retirement. I spent most of my fortune preparing. Some on supplies, but mostly hunting down an artefact that I hoped might give me some . . . protection. One I had sold right at the start of my career: an old broken camera. One that through some quirk had the ability to hide you from the Powers.
>
> —MAG 181: "Ignorance"

Level: 8

Related Entity: The Spiral

Stress: 3 upon recognizing the camera's ability; 1 each week of using it

Horror Mode, page 122

Description: This old camera projects its twisted reflection of reality through the cracked glass of its broken lens, hiding everything within very long range from being sensed by the Entities (including The Spiral) or any of their Avatars and aspects. Moreover, the camera blocks active use of paranormal abilities in the same area.

The Entities, page 166

Fear: The camera acts as a sort of battery, charging itself on all the quiet worries that come from living in hiding, and discharges when taken or stolen from someone, causing all that fear to flow out at once to feed The Spiral. This paranormal implosion kills the owner (if not already dead) on a failed Intellect defense roll and deals a serious injury to everyone in short range on a failed Speed defense roll.

CHELICERAE

> The Chelicerae popped up on the occasional paranormal site or edgy message board, each time accompanied by a now-defunct link. According to those who follow such things, all you had to do was start a new thread as a guest—something that Greg had been instructed to make sure was possible—and the title of that thread should be the name of someone you want dead.
>
> As the stories went, you would receive a reply almost immediately and it would simply ask you for a story. You would have to write out and post, in full, a horrible event that had happened to you or someone that you loved. All the instructions were very clear that the target would only die if the account satisfied the "story-spinner." None of them made any mention of what happened if it did not.
>
> —MAG 123: "Web Development"

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 3 when viewer realizes the website's purpose; 3 when used

Description: The hard-to-find website called Chelicerae is a primitive message board filled with threads, each titled with someone's name. If a user starts a new discussion titled with the name of someone they want dead, and posts a story detailing a horrible experience they (or someone they love) personally suffered, the person named in the title comes to the attention of The Web. If The Web (or its Avatar, such as The Weaver) is impressed by the story, the person in the title is marked for death. Impressing The Web requires a successful difficulty 5 Intellect-based storytelling roll.

The Web, page 176

The Weaver, page 246

NPCs of level 5 or less who are marked for death "perish" within the week, becoming bewebbed puppets.

Bewebbed puppet, page 200

PCs marked for death enter their own personal Horror Mode, whose range increases by 1 each day. When the intrusion range reaches 1–5, the next triggered intrusion the PC suffers begins their own transformation process. If they fail three Might defense rolls (made once every few hours) before succeeding on three, they become a bewebbed puppet.

If someone finds the website, hacks it, and deletes a thread before the person marked for death succumbs, The Web loses interest.

Fear: The story posted does not impress The Web, and the poster instead becomes marked for death.

COFFIN OF THE BURIED

Level: 7

Related Entity: The Buried

Stress: 3 upon acquiring the artefact; 1 if attempting to use it against someone; 1 for each hour trapped in The Buried by way of the coffin

Description: "Do Not Open" is scratched into the unvarnished face of this wooden coffin wrapped in a padlocked chain. If the coffin is unlocked and opened, a staircase of roughly hewn stone steps is revealed, leading deep into the ground. Anyone descending the stairs becomes trapped in the domain of The Buried. Each time the coffin is opened, someone within immediate range—usually, whoever is nearest to it—must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or attempt to descend the stairs.

The key to any padlock or other locking mechanism for the coffin is always easy to locate.

The Buried, page 170

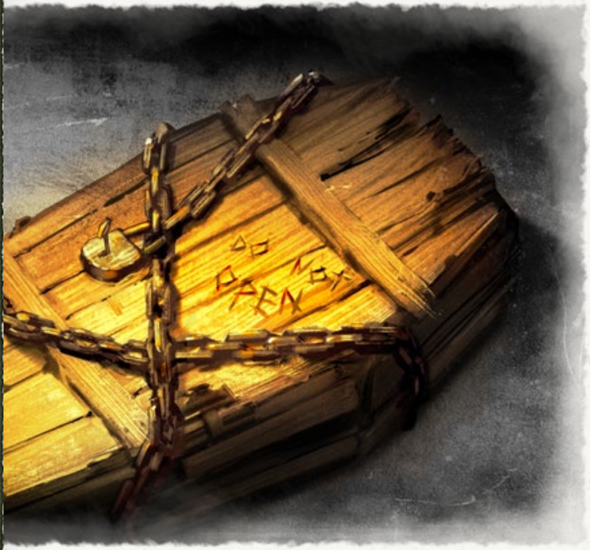
Those descending the stairs (and/or those who change their minds and try to ascend again) eventually discover the steps end in narrow, close passages that seem to press in, closer and closer, so that eventually the explorers become entombed in slowly crushing earth or stone. Sometimes they faintly hear other victims begging to be saved, saying they can't breathe. Other times they become

> Inside was a coffin. I don't know what I expected but it wasn't that. My knife fell to the floor and I just stared at it in mute surprise. It was made of unvarnished, pale yellow wood and had a thick metal chain wrapped around it, which was closed at the top with a heavy iron padlock. The lock was closed but had the key sitting inside it. I started to reach for it, when I noticed two other things on the coffin lid. The first was a piece of paper, folded in half and tucked under the chain, which I took. The other was the presence of three words, scratched deep into the wood of the casket in letters three inches high. They read "Do Not Open."
>
> —MAG 2: "Do Not Open"

> Until at last, we felt it: the eclipse.
>
> We had been worshipping in the deepest dark, and yet when it crossed the sun, I felt it roll over us like a cooling balm on a summer's day, plunging us into a deep, black void far more complete than I can ever convey with mere words. It was more than beautiful; it was divine. And as we unveiled our new and absent sun, the sacrifices who remained screamed and fell in holy agonies, and the world of endless night we had been promised began to pour in, shining out and all around us. It touched and caressed our souls with the soothing fears of night, and I heard Maxwell weeping with joy at what we had done.
>
> —MAG 143: "Heart of Darkness"

the plaything of a buried thing for a few rounds. Most are trapped forever, or at least until they finally succumb to the fear and horror of their endless entombment.

Fear: Someone sleeping near the coffin is compelled to sleepwalk their way to and into it on a failed Intellect defense roll.



DARK STAR

Level: 7

Related Entity: The Dark

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding how to use the dark star; 3 with each use

Description: Those who look on this sphere of inky darkness (normally contained in a structure or storage container) must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or be consumed by negative radiance. Having previously pledged oneself to The Dark eases this defense task by four steps.

Someone who has looked on the dark star and survived can use it to create an apparent solar eclipse in the surrounding region, darkening an area 25 miles (40 km) in diameter for one minute. Doing so requires a successful difficulty 7 Intellect task as part of a one-minute ritual; this task can be eased by one or more steps with the help of others who've also looked upon the artefact and survived its negative radiance.

Fear: Someone misjudges the edge of the dark star and, on a failed Speed defense roll, falls in and takes a serious injury each round until they can escape its grasp.

Buried thing, page 204

The Dark, page 171

DARK WARDROBE

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Dark

Stress: 3 upon acquiring it and realizing no light can exist within the wardrobe

The dark wardrobe is mentioned briefly in the podcast episode MAG 51: "High Pressure."

Death, page 210

Description: This functions as a standard oaken wardrobe, but the owner quickly discovers that anything they store inside must be found by feeling around in the darkness within. No light penetrates.

Lightless beast, page 224

After a couple of days—probably while the owner is not present—the dark wardrobe spawns a lightless beast, which slithers off to threaten the owner or someone the owner knows. Later, it may spawn still another, but this time it waits so that someone can see the new beast emerge.

The Sandman, page 236

The Buried, page 170

Fear: The Sandman emerges instead of a lightless beast.

> Now, as long as there have been people and games, there have been tales of those who gambled with Death. Some as metaphor, some as myth, but the soldier had heard enough of these tales to make his own last, desperate gamble, and he challenged Death to a game. There was silence for several long minutes before it nodded its head.
>
> Reaching into its robe, Death pulled out three things: a chess knight, a domino and a pair of dice, each scrimshawed out of old bone.
>
> —MAG 29: "Cheating Death"

DEATH'S GAME PIECE

Level: 1d6 + 2

Related Entity: The End

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding how to use one of Death's game pieces; 1 with each game played using a piece

Description: Players of a game using one of these pieces—even a single domino, die, chess piece, or something else carved of old bone—are enveloped in a bubble of timelessness while they play. Outside it, no time passes. The bubble collapses if any player attempts to affect a person or object outside the bubble, if anyone leaves the bubble, or if a player wins the game.

Fear: Death's attention is drawn to one of the players using the piece.

ENTOMBING CRATE

Level: 1d6

Related Entity: The Buried

Stress: 3 upon realizing the threat the crate represents (and/or if entombed)

Description: If this old wooden crate is opened while empty, the opener comes to the attention of The Buried for the next four days, regardless of how much distance they put between themselves and the crate. If they remain awake for the entire four days, no harm comes to them. But if they doze off during that 96-hour period, they wake entombed in the crate, pressed against a hard surface above, below, and to either side. It's utterly dark, and attempts to move reveal the needling sharpness of splinters.

Outside the crate, time creeps past at a rate of one day for each four days that pass within. Inside, someone who is trapped can attempt to escape with a Might-based roll, hindered by two steps because it's difficult to gain leverage pressed so closely inside. On a failed roll, the entombed victim suffers 1 point of Stress from splinters.

The entombed victim also suffers 1 point of Stress for each hour they are confined, as the interior slowly shrinks. Someone who can't escape must rely on someone outside finding and opening the crate to secure their release. A victim who dies within the crate isn't inside if the crate is later opened.

Fear: Distraction or an unforeseen accident means the character who has come to The Buried's attention falls asleep.

> I sighed, got to my feet, and as I did so, I grabbed the edge of an old wooden crate for support. I felt the lid shift slightly under my weight. I looked at it a bit closer and couldn't help but notice it didn't seem to have any bolts or locks on it and the lid clearly hadn't been nailed shut. I reached over to try and slide it back into place, but my gloved hand slipped, and as I tried to grip it, I swear I barely touched the thing, but the wooden top slid further off, releasing a dusty cloud of air that sent me into a coughing fit. The air was dry and hot in a way that seemed rather alarming in the frigid shipping container. The inside was dark, the light from the entrance not reaching this far back. I shined my light in and to my surprise, the crate appeared to be completely empty.
>
> —MAG 66: "Held in Customs"

> Cook did have his right arm up to the elbow in the mincer, his left hand working the crank, around and around. I could hear the sound of bone and flesh grinding, but there was nothing coming out the other end of the machine. Then I saw what was lying on the counter. It was his arm, neatly sliced off and butchered into cuts of meat, the bone shining white through the blood and dark skin. And I remembered he'd promised us pork chop tonight.
>
> Looking back at Cook, I saw the ecstasy on his face, with just a hint of manic terror, as he turned the crank, and a new arm came out, bit by bit, raw and glistening. It didn't look like his old one, but there was a part of me sure it would taste just the same.
>
> —MAG 115: "Taking Stock"

FLESH GRINDER

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Flesh

Stress: 3 upon recognizing the artefact's abilities; 2 with each use

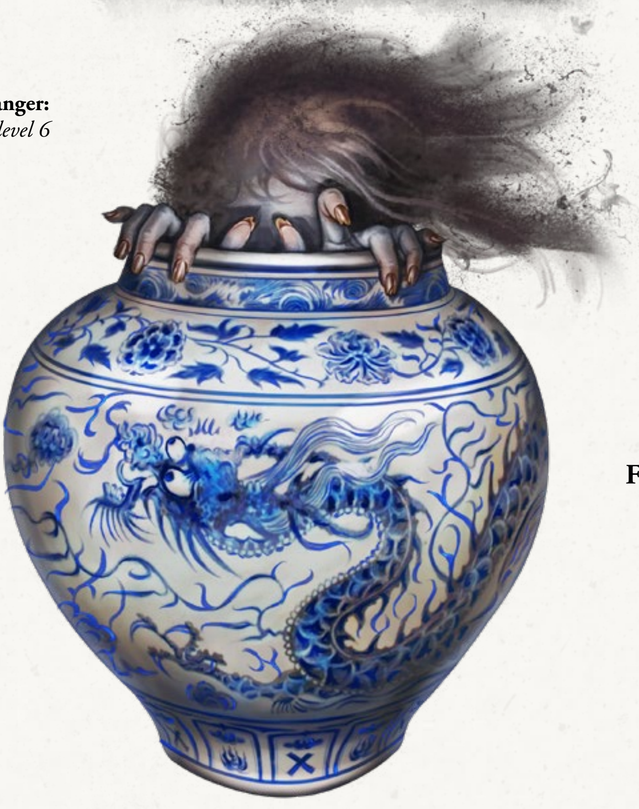
Description: This antique meat grinder features a heavy vise to clamp it on the table and a crank for twisting the screw that pushes the meat from the funnel along and into the mincer. A rusty old thing, all heavy iron and brand names worn away to nothing, the grinder responds well to care and polish.

If the grinder is not currently claimed, each time someone new sees it, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or become fascinated with the device, "claiming" it. They (and anyone who identifies it, as normal) can use the grinder to regenerate a lost finger, hand, foot, arm, or leg by placing the stump of the lost tissue in the funnel and using the crank, until a regenerated limb emerges from the mince. The user can reattach the regrown tissue to the stump and regain full use of the lost digit or limb. Or they can find some other use for the newly spawned meat.

Someone fascinated with the grinder must succeed on an Intellect defense roll each day to resist using it even without need.

Fear: Someone using the artefact can't help putting their other hand, foot, or limb into the grinder and destroying the original tissue.

> From the Jiajing period, so Salesa said, and the construction seemed to back him up. The glaze and the workmanship fitted with mid-to-late Ming dynasty, but there was something . . . off about the actual design. Instead of the pictures or scenes common to the ceramics of the period, the blue glaze was painted on in crisp, thin geometric lines. They repeated perfectly and seemed to get smaller and more intricate the closer I looked, but the shapes they formed never lost any of the precision, seeming to continue on however closely I looked. The effect was disorientating, and made the vase seem smaller than it actually was. It made my head hurt a bit when I looked at it for too long. It was amazing.
>
> —MAG 38: "Lost and Found"



Aspect of The Stranger:
level 6

FRACTAL POT

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Spiral

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding how to use the pot (or realizing how the pot has been affecting them); 1 with each annulled object

Description: This ceramic pot—decorated with geometric blue lines that fractally converge—seems like it might be valuable and/or have historical significance. When someone first claims it as their own, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll. If they fail, the pot begins afflicting them, randomly eliminating their possessions at a rate of about one a day. Lost objects are excised from reality, so that other than in the owner's recollection, the object never existed in the first place. Each lost possession is something the owner values, such as their dress shoes or autographed copy of *Catch-22*, as chosen by the GM.

If the owner attempts to destroy the pot, observe it closely for several hours, or give it away after it has already started taking their things, it disgorges everything it took. One round later, pale shapes of long, thin fingertips with dirty fingernails creep above the lip of the pot, and an aspect of The Stranger emerges. It's impossible to fully describe the aspect because the moment someone looks away, its appearance slips from their mind. The aspect attempts to pull the owner into the pot, but can be beaten back with sufficient force; otherwise the owner vanishes. If the owner flees, they're safe, and the pot can be claimed by or sold to someone else.

Fear: A person the owner cares for is erased from existence.

> Finally, he pointed to the oldest of the pelts. He told me it was gorilla skin from Carthage, brought by Hanno in the 5th century BC, and that it might just be the oldest piece of taxidermy in the world. To be honest, I didn't believe him. Even if a gorilla's hide could be preserved for more than two millennia, it seemed an unlikely thing to be found in the back of a shop in Barnet.
>
> —MAG 54: "Still Life"

GORILLA SKIN

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Stranger

Stress: 1 upon acquiring and recognizing its significance; 1 with each use

Description: When this ancient taxidermized gorilla hide is worn like a cape, the wearer appears as a stranger even to those who know them. The wearer can't disguise themselves as anyone in particular, but instead, appears as someone no one knows. If relevant, stealth and disguise tasks of the wearer are eased by three steps.

Fear: The wearer no longer recognizes themself in the mirror, and sometimes their body no longer acts as if their own, randomly hindering some tasks and easing others.

> And then it happened again—this time it was a painting: a drab English pastoral that pulled you into The Lonely. Again, I made a lot of money and remained untouched. It's the sort of thing to set a man thinking about his life, you understand?
>
> —MAG 181: "Ignorance"

LONELY PAINTING

Level: 1d6

Related Entity: The Lonely

Stress: 3 upon acquiring and understanding the painting's effect

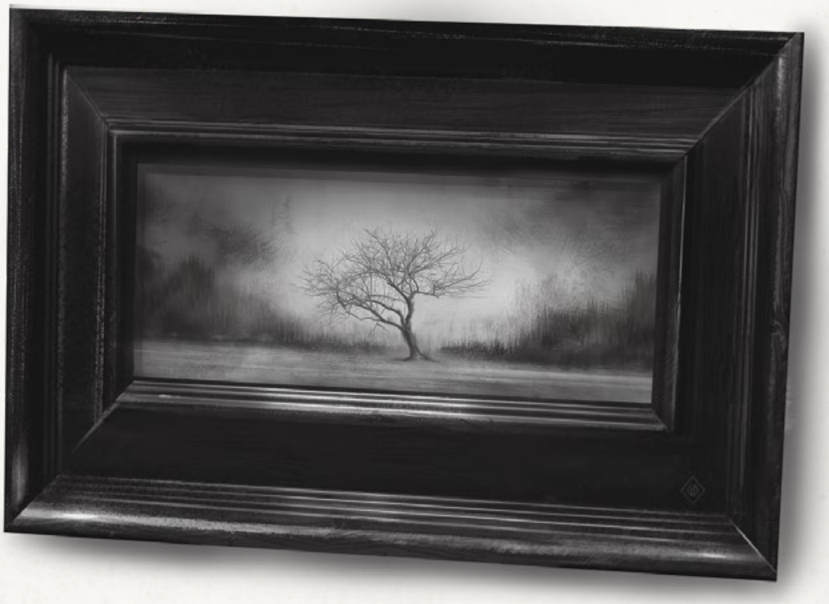
Description: After possessing this drab landscape painting (which lacks people, animals, or action) for a few days, the owner is pulled into The Lonely on a failed Intellect defense roll. They find themselves wandering completely alone in a misted, muted, mirror reflection of what was shown in the painting. Isolated individuals take 1 point of Stress each hour they fail an Intellect defense roll. They can attempt an Intellect-based task each minute they spend searching for a way out. On a success, they appear within a few yards to a few miles of where they were lost.

Fear: The stored, covered, or otherwise hidden painting is, unaccountably, back on full display.

The Lonely, page 174

The gorilla skin can be used to fulfill the Unknowing ritual's component of "a costume of special power or distinction."

The Unknowing, page 175



> The more I think about it, the more I think that opening that box felt no different to any of the others. No odd feelings, no smells, nothing. It was just a box, empty of everything except a single typewritten note and an old hand mirror. It lay inside, utterly innocuous. If it was a trap, there was no way to tell. I picked up the note first. The typing was neat, managed to be completely centered, even though the paper seemed to be a scrap that had been torn from a larger piece. It read, in all capitals, "BEHIND YOU."
>
> —MAG 60: "Observer Effect"

MIRROR OF BEHOLDING

Level: 1d6

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 2 upon recognizing the mirror's horrific reflective quality; 1 if using the mirror on another

Description: Someone seeing their own reflection in this antique hand mirror also sees a huge, staring face somewhere behind them, watching. Regardless of what the user does next (including smashing the mirror), they become a mirror haunt's subject of observation on a failed Intellect defense roll.

Mirror haunt, page 228

Fear: Despite precautions, an accident or other circumstance results in the bearer (or someone nearby) seeing their own reflection in the mirror.

PATTERNED RUG

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Spiral

Stress: 3 when recognizing the pattern as a personal threat; 3 when seeing the pattern (an aspect of The Spiral) attack someone else

Description: If this old rug is unrolled and its pattern of squares and diamonds is glanced at, an aspect of The Spiral mirroring the design is spawned and gazes back hungrily. (If multiple people look, the aspect chooses the nearest as its target; everyone else just sees a normal-seeming pattern.) Sometime within the next three hours (possibly immediately), the aspect departs the rug and seeks out whoever it chose. If the aspect kills its target, the pattern fully enters the corpse, which continues to convulse and thrash for about a minute, then grows still. Within about an hour, a deceitful arc blazing with the same pattern originally seen on the rug is born from the body (burning it to ash), and if not bound by the rug, escapes into the sky.

Aspect of The Spiral: *level 5, stealth as level 7; immediate-range gaze attack deals 3 Stress*

Deceitful arc, page 211

> He was being attacked, that much was clear, but there wasn't anyone there. The thing that was grabbing him, trying to reach down his throat and pull him apart . . . it was a pattern. Diamonds and swirls and colours that seemed to imprint itself upon his skin even as it pushed itself messily into his nose and mouth. What it was made of, I couldn't say; the way it moved and shifted made my head throb with pain. I screamed, staggered back and fell, hitting my head on the table. I can't have been out for more than a few seconds, but when I opened my eyes he was there, dragging the thrashing body of Gantulga through the door and up onto the deck. I followed slowly, unsteadily, but got there just in time to see Salesa throw both him and what looked like a blank rug over the side and into the ocean.
>
> —MAG 141: "Doomed Voyage"

Fear: The container, strap, or other method meant to secure the rug fails, and it flops out and unrolls.

PESTILENT SCALPEL

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Corruption

Stress: 3 upon acquiring the scalpel and realizing it's impossible to sterilize or disinfect it; 1 each time it is physically wielded to attack another person

Description: This corroded and pitted scalpel is usually stored in a hermetically sealed plastic box. Whenever the scalpel is exposed to air—or, if continuously exposed, about once a day—it sheds a new airborne infectious disease. Everyone in immediate range must succeed on a Might defense roll or contract a novel pathogen (level 5 disease) and immediately gain 2 points of Stress. Each day diseased individuals must succeed on a Might defense roll or take a serious injury. If a diseased individual succeeds on three Might defense rolls, they gradually improve and throw off the sickness.

The scalpel can be used as a light weapon. Each time a target is hit by the scalpel in combat, they develop a distinct new disease on a failed Might defense roll.

Fear: The hermetically sealed container in which the scalpel is stored cracks, begins leaking, or shatters.

ROCK EYE

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 3 when owner understands the rock eye's effect; 1 with each use

Description: Someone who takes this carved rock eye from the black velvet bag it's normally stored in eases their perception tasks by two steps. However, their Intellect-based tasks (other than perception) are hindered for an hour after they remove the eye from the bag.

Fear: The Abiding Watcher notices the rock eye's owner.

> So it's another statement is it? Like I owe you something? Even though I warned you the handle might have splinters, that you should always be wearing gloves if you're going to try firing it. And you knew where it was from, the signs of rage and violence to be watching for. So far, I don't see how it's my fault, and I don't consider myself liable.
>
> —MAG 115: "Taking Stock"

SLAUGHTER GUN

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Slaughter

Stress: 3 upon acquiring the pistol and realizing its provenance

Description: Anyone handling this Luger pistol (a long-range medium weapon) without gloves must succeed on a Speed defense roll or suffer 1 point of Stress from surprise splinters from the grip. Despite that, the pistol seems eager to be used, and if the user wishes, they can spray multiple shots at a target, easing their attack roll. Weirdly, this only uses a single round of ammunition.

However, once someone fires the weapon, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or attack any and every living creature within short range with it. Shots fired during this period don't use any ammunition. Affected shooters can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to drop the gun, ending their compulsion (but dealing 3 points of Stress from the experience).

Fear: Someone who handles the gun and seems fine (or who succumbs but recovers with a successful defense roll) begins to secretly yearn for the weapon. If they don't act to reacquire it within the week, the gun still somehow ends up among their possessions.

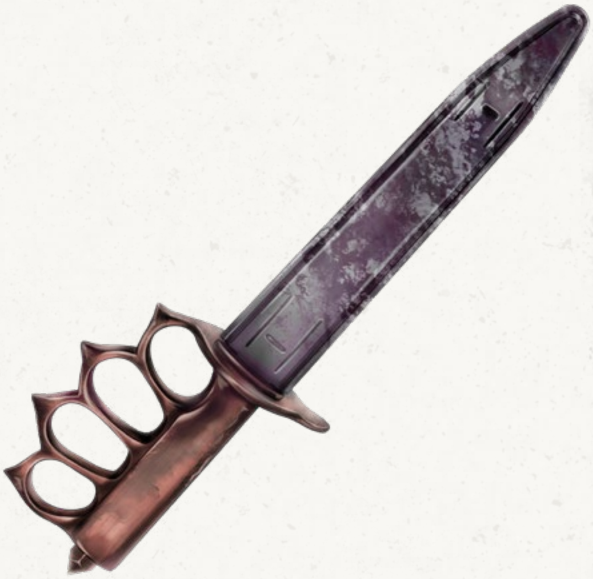
The pestilent scalpel is mentioned briefly in the podcast episode MAG 51: "High Pressure."

Medium weapon, page 100

Light weapon, page 100

The rock eye is mentioned briefly in the podcast episode MAG 51: "High Pressure."

The Abiding Watcher, page 196



My favourite was the old knife, rusted from the trenches and lied about by a barking auctioneer. We delivered it to a leering banker, who knew the second they saw us what they'd done. Sweat dripped from under their bowler hat as they took the knife from its dented metal case and screamed. They lunged at me, stabbing me over and through, then moved on to him. But he just laughed as the blade went in and out, and no blood flowed from the holes they cut. And when the banker had screamed all the curses they had learned from German gas attacks, the knife turned back again and cut them piece by piece by piece.

—MAG 128: "Heavy Goods"

SLAUGHTER KNIFE

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Slaughter

Stress: 3 upon acquiring the knife and realizing its power

Light weapon, page 100

Description: Anyone who directly handles this rusted old military trench knife (treat as a light weapon) must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or use it to attack any and every living creature within short range. Affected wielders can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to drop the knife, ending their compulsion.

Fear: The wielder turns the knife on themself, inflicting a serious injury. Thereafter, they can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to drop the knife (or an ally can try to wrestle it free); otherwise the wielder continues inflicting a serious injury to themself each round.

The Corruption, page 170

The Plaguebearer, page 233

SYRINGE OF DR. SNOW

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Corruption

Stress: 1 upon recognizing the item is a supernatural object; 3 upon realizing they have lost the "warding" effect when they lose possession of the syringe

Description: This old Victorian syringe is in good shape and comes with its own small case. It supposedly once belonged to the nineteenth-century physician John Snow, who was pivotal in laying the groundwork for the germ theory of disease transmission and is widely credited with helping end the cholera outbreak of 1854.

Anyone in possession of the syringe eases their defense tasks against disease by three steps. More generally, manifestations of The Corruption (especially disease, paranormal rot, and insect infestation) in the vicinity are suppressed or hindered by three steps, whichever is applicable.

Fear: The syringe is lost, sold, or otherwise goes missing, whereupon the owner gains the vengeful attention of The Corruption or one of its Avatars, such as The Plaguebearer.

> The tests came back, and were as alarming as they were impossible. It was blood. Real blood. O negative and infected with malaria. Not just malaria though, but yellow fever, hepatitis B and signs of cholera. There were other substances in the sample as well, that they were unable to identify. We were all told that we were to be quarantined immediately, and that our project was shut down until further notice. I remember standing there in the lab as they said this. I heard a strangled cry from behind me, and turned around to see Neil, shaking his head over and over, his face a mask of rage and hatred. He wasn't looking at the people who had come to quarantine us though. No, he was looking at the room full of mosquitoes, as though they had planned this, as though it was purely through their malicious intent that he was watching his career burn to nothing.
>
> —MAG 45: "Blood Bag"

THRUMMING COCOON

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 3 upon seeing the thrumming cocoon and recognizing it as a threat; 1 when consciously revealed to someone else

Description: This thrumming, silk-wrapped object is usually stored in a steamer trunk or a similarly sized container. When first viewed, the "cocoon" begins visibly vibrating and audibly thrumming. The viewer (or, if noticed by multiple people at once, whoever is nearest) is immobilized on a failed Intellect defense roll. The affected viewer is frozen with fatalistic horror as the silk falls away to reveal a nightmarish, animate metal spider with writhing pedipalps and siphon-like chelicerae. The spider proceeds to hollow out and drink the helpless viewer (inflicting a serious injury every few rounds), assuming it's not distracted and/or dispatched by others. Someone who is immobilized can try another Intellect defense roll each round to escape their helplessness.

Fear: The metal spider animates on its own and stealthily seeks out someone who previously viewed it and survived, someone marked by The Web in some other fashion, or just someone at random.

Metal spider: *level 5; health 20*

The Web, page 176

> We had some luggage once, a thrumming, silk-wrapped thing of the Spider, hiding away in an old steamer trunk. We stepped heavy through the dining car and found an old woman near the caboose. "Something strange in the luggage car," he said, and I finished as was our way, "You should come and see it." She stood and walked with us readily enough, though tears flowed silent down her cheeks and patterned onto the faded carpet. The Spider's always an easy job, no fuss, no complications, everything planned and prepared. It knows too much to truly be a Stranger but hides its knowing well enough to endure. We knew she wouldn't scream as she was hollowed out and drunk, but still he thought best to cover the sounds with a laugh. He was always our humor.
>
> —MAG 128: "Heavy Goods"

The Web, page 176
The Weaver, page 246

> TIM: Er, what is it?
> JONATHAN SIMS: A lighter. An old Zippo.
> TIM: You smoke?
> JONATHAN SIMS: No. And I don't allow ignition sources in my archive!
> TIM: Okay. Is there anything unusual about it?
> JONATHAN SIMS: Not really. Just a sort of spider web design on the front. Doesn't mean anything to me. You?
> TIM: Ah no. No.
>
> —MAG 36: "Taken Ill"

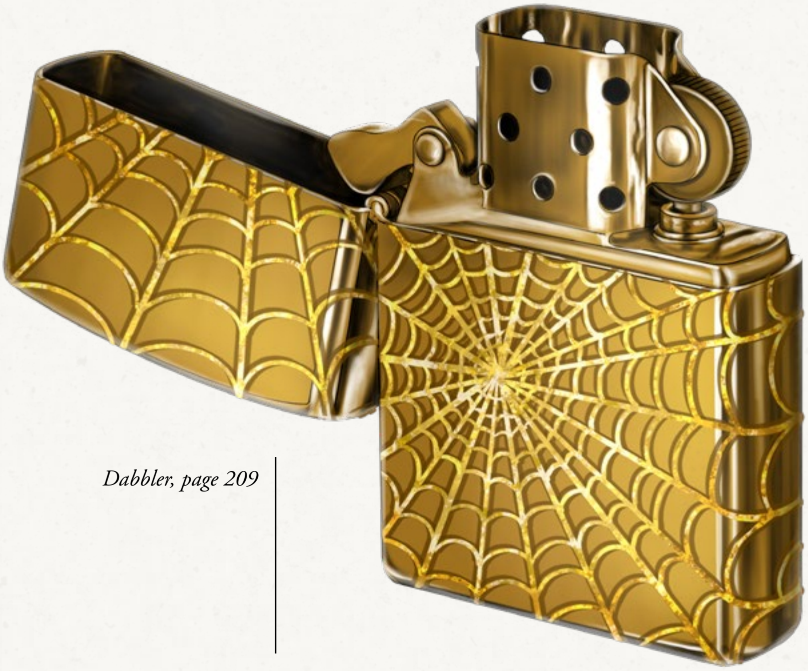
WEB LIGHTER

Level: 1d6 + 3

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 3 upon realizing its true nature

Description: This metallic gold flip lighter features an embossed spiderweb design but doesn't otherwise seem special. However, with extended use, it never seems to run out of lighter fluid. If lost or stolen, the web lighter somehow manages to return to its owner (usually in a way that doesn't seem out of place, reappearing among their possessions; maybe it was never lost in the first place?).



The owner never consciously considers or notices their own possession of the lighter; if others point it out, the owner instinctively changes the subject on a failed Intellect defense roll. However, the owner does find it to hand when fire is likely only to make the situation worse.

Though it's not immediately obvious, someone with one of these in their possession can be tracked by Avatars of The Web, including The Weaver, allowing them to manifest aspects of their power around the owner as they see fit.

Fear: Even if purposefully left behind, the web lighter finds its way back to the owner. If destroyed, a new one is delivered.

> It was an ornate wooden thing, with a snaking pattern of lines weaving their way around towards the centre. The pattern was hypnotic and shifted as I watched it, like an optical illusion. I found my eyes following the lines towards the middle of the table, where there was nothing but a small square hole.
>
> —MAG 3: "Across the Street"

WEB TABLE

Level: 7

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 1 upon studying the table; 1 when using it

Dabbler, page 209

Description: This large, dark wood table is engraved with a hypnotic pattern that leads one's gaze to a recess at the table's center. Someone with knowledge of the Entities, such as a dabbler (or someone who identifies the artefact, as normal), can use the table to bind an Avatar or aspect of an Entity to the table if they succeed on an Intellect-based attack against a qualified target within short range. A bound target vanishes, swallowed by the table. While swallowed, the target can see and hear what goes on near the table, but otherwise can't act.

An Avatar or other powerful being can remanifest in their regular form, despite being bound. They can't stray more than a very long range from the table, and all their tasks are hindered by three steps. They also cannot personally harm the table that binds them.

Fear: By accident, design, or misunderstanding, the table is destroyed, releasing at least one bound Avatar or aspect of an Entity, such as an angry NotThem.

NotThem, page 230

> MARTIN: Wait. Wait . . . The tapes . . .
> ANNABELLE: A fine material to spin a web with, don't you think?
> MARTIN: What? All this time, through all of this, it, it was just you *spying* on us?
> ANNABELLE: Oh Martin. You have no idea who's listening, do you?
> —MAG 196: "This Old House"

WEB TAPE RECORDER

Level: 1d6 + 2

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 1 each time someone notices one that shouldn't be there and/or it begins recording by itself

Description: These resemble the sort of tape recorders popular in the 1980s and can play and record cassette tapes normally.

Most people who encounter them never realize there's anything uncanny about them, other than their ability to record the statements of supernatural events (or the events themselves) with less distortion than purely digital recordings.

However, if someone catches the attention of The Weaver or another powerful Avatar of The Web, these recorders begin infiltrating that person's life. At first their appearances seem normal, but eventually they appear as if from nowhere to record what's happening. Everything recorded is heard by the Avatar who sent them.

Fear: Someone realizing the tape recorder's true fealty loses their memory of the incident that revealed its association with The Web.

> It was making my eyes hurt to watch and I started to feel dizzy, but I couldn't bring myself to look away. Even then, I thought I was just looking at a very well-done horror set piece, especially when I started to notice a handful of English words popping into the wall of shifting text for a second or two at a time. One of them read "helphelphelp," all run together, and another, "it peels my mind like knives." My mouth was dry and my hand was shaking, but even then all I could think was how good this was. I was genuinely impressed by how unsettled it was making me.
> —MAG 65: "Binary"

YUSHANKA CHATBOT

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Spiral and The Flesh

Stress: 1 the first time the chat window is opened and interacted with; 1 for every few hours (seventeen total) the chatbot video is watched; 1 each time the video begins playing on another screen near the victim

Description: This chatbot is available in a number of possible digital formats, including an installable file called YushankasDespair.exe that's just over 1 megabyte in size. If accessed, the chatbot window that pops up is quite basic.

If a prompt is entered, the answer comes in the form of a mess of symbols and letters, some not even ASCII. The response scrolls, and amid the wall of shifting text, recognizable words begin appearing, then full phrases. Eventually video begins to play, showing a balding, crying man in his late thirties, eating keyboard keys.

Anytime the viewer stops their computer, the video tries to play on another nearby screen, such as their phone, a television, or a laptop that's turned off or even unplugged, though no one but the original viewer is able to see it. The video follows the viewer wherever they go, eventually adding sounds of crunching and the man muttering (in a Russian accent) things like "It feels like thinking through cheese wire" and "There's no feeling, but the no feeling hurts" and "It's cold without blood."

The haunting only ends if the viewer sits down and watches all seventeen hours, despite how sick and dizzy it makes them. The video ends with the man smiling, lying down, and saying, "The maze is sharp on my mind. The angles cut me when I try to think." Then he stops moving and the back of his head seems to be missing.

Fear: The viewer comes under a compulsion to eat their own keyboard. If they go through with it (because they can't stop themselves or others can't), they take a serious injury.

> Did I ever tell you about my first Leitner? Of course, this was before he was collecting them, so back then it was just a strange book. Odd to think there was a time before he'd stamped them with his mark. I feel we must have called them something. Did we even know how many there were? Or did we just think of each as a thing all its own?
>
> —MAG 62: "First Edition"

BOOKS

Books are a subcategory of artefacts, considered by many to be a purer incarnation of other cursed items linked to the Entities. But like regular artefacts, most are malevolent, seeking to feed on the fear of those who read or handle them. Some are entirely innocuous, but a dangerous number are truly murderous.

Artefacts, page 248

The Entities, page 166

INTERACTING WITH BOOKS

The line between books and regular artefacts can be blurry. Generally speaking, books function like artefacts in the game: Unless indicated otherwise in a particular book's description, they can be found, identified, and used like other cursed objects.

Finding, Identifying, and Using Artefacts, page 248

Books are presented with stats like artefacts, and thus have a level, a related Entity (or Entities), a Stress cost for interacting with them, and a potential fear.

How Artefact Stats Work, page 249

But many books have additional features, including whether they were once part of a larger collection of "Leitners" and whether a given book is subject to destruction.

LEITNERS

Depending on the particulars of your game, many paranormal books in circulation may have once been part of The Book Collector's library. All such books include a bookplate reading "From the library of Jurgen Leitner" (or whatever the name of The Book Collector is in your setting). Because volumes with this bookplate were later found to be haunted and/or cursed in some fashion, *any* book that possesses supernatural abilities might be referred to as a Leitner by those familiar with them, whether or not a given tome was ever part of his collection.

The Book Collector, page 202

For details on making your own books in the game, see page 250.

DESTROYING A BOOK

Many books resist destruction; they can't be burned, shredded, or torn. Indeed, attempts to do so could trigger their fear in retaliation (GM's discretion).

Other times, a book may allow itself to be destroyed by violence or flame, but only so it can release its fear across everyone in the vicinity, whether that's explicitly indicated (such as for *Killer's Song*) or because it is narratively appropriate.

Killer's Song, *page 278*

Even if a book is destroyed, the Entity to which it's linked remains. It usually works to reintroduce that book into the world again one way or another, which could be as simple as having an Avatar reproduce and republish it.

> ARCHIVIST: So the books, the monsters, they're part of these beings? Just extensions of them? Fingers being pushed into our world?
>
> LEITNER: The books are, I think, their essences in a purer form.
>
> —MAG 80: "The Librarian"

BOOKS

The Anatomy of Melancholy
The Boneturner's Tale
Book of the Dead
Catalogue of the Trapped Dead
Dead Animals
Dictionnaire Infernal
DIG
A Disappearance
Ex Altiora
A Guest for Mr. Spider
Infinity Above: A Book of Astronomy
An Introduction to Higher Anatomy
A Journal of the Plague Year
The Joy of Eating
The Key of Solomon
Killer's Song
Roaring Desolation
Seen
Security camera instruction manual
The Seven Lamps of Architecture
Spiders Are Eating
The Stalwart Hunters' Almanac
The Tale of a Field Hospital
The Travels
Whispers in White Matter

A SELECTION OF BOOKS

> I spent some time with a small grey volume, I think it was in Cyrillic, that decided it was at home amongst my bookshelves. I couldn't read it, of course, but . . . when it tried to read me back, I buried it on a lonely stretch of moorland.
>
> —MAG 91: "The Coming Storm"

THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 3 if a reader resists the book's attempt to read them; none if they succumb and are drained of emotion

Description: This unique volume of Robert Burton's medical text—translated into Russian—uses melancholy as a principal metaphor to explore all human emotions. However, each time someone glances at any page from the book (even if they can't read it), they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or feel themselves being "read back," draining them of emotion for about an hour. Someone drained of emotion is essentially unable to act of their own volition. They may take up tasks others command them, acting without emotion, but if that command is not continually reinforced, the target lapses back into inactivity. Someone so affected can attempt an Intellect defense roll each minute to end the effect early.

Fear: On a reader's failed Might defense roll, the book reads more than emotion from them and physically erases some part of their body, such as an ear, an eye, or a hand. Or, in some cases, all of them.

THE BONETURNER'S TALE

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Flesh

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 with each use

Description: This thick black paperback is written in English. No author is attributed. It follows the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* and their interactions with a newly introduced pilgrim: the Bonesmith. Those interactions usually turn grisly.

Each time the book is studied for at least one hour, the user can attempt to make one gross physical change to their own physiology, such as making themselves up to a foot (30 cm) taller, sharpening their fingers, making themselves more attractive, adding a layer of muscle, or possibly adding an extra organ, eye, mouth, and so on. Each such change is permanent, unless changed again later.

If The Boneturner's Tale *is stored with regular books after being used by a reader, nearby books begin to bleed.*

> I flicked ahead a few pages, and found the Bonesmith had apparently crept up to the Miller while he slept. It described him silently reaching inside him, and . . . it's a bit hazy. All I remember clearly is the line "and from his rib a flute to play that merry tune of marrow took." And as for the rest, I don't recall in detail, but I know that I almost threw up, and that the Miller did not survive.
>
> —MAG 17:
> "The Boneturner's Tale"

A purely decorative change requires a successful difficulty 2 Intellect-based roll. Changes that grant the character a basic mechanical benefit—such as easing Might-based tasks because of additional muscle, easing interaction rolls because of uncanny physical symmetry, or dealing an additional point of damage from attacks with sharpened fingers—require succeeding on a difficulty 4 Intellect-based roll. Each additional change made while already enjoying the benefits of an earlier change hinders the next attempt by an additional step.

On a failed task to achieve a change, the mishap inflicts 3 points of Stress as the reader's body slumps like wet clay, hindering all physical tasks (and undoing any previous benefits) for about ten hours, during which time no more changes can be attempted.

A reader can attempt to change another willing person in the same way. Against an unwilling person, the reader first must make an attack roll, then make an Intellect-based roll for the change itself.

Fear: The reader gains the attention of an Entity. They must either stop using the book completely or keep using it with the knowledge that they are entering into a contract with The Flesh, possibly requiring them to become an Avatar.

The Entities, page 166

The Flesh, page 173

> There wasn't any obvious name on the cover, and I wondered if it might have had a dust wrapper that had been lost, but it seemed far too large for anything like that to fit. Opening it up at the beginning, it seemed to lack a proper title page as well, or any other form of identification. Instead, printed there was a quote, though there wasn't any attribution for it.
>
> It read: "Life is a current which cannot be fought. It is a march with one destination. You cannot cease your step nor move your course to one that skirts the journey's termination."
>
> And below it, in a faded blue ink was a handwritten message: "You have already read too much."
>
> —MAG 70:
> "The Book of the Dead"

BOOK OF THE DEAD

Level: 6

Related Entity: The End

Stress: 1 upon realizing the book details the reader's future; 3 each time the book is opened and the reader sees the manner of their predicted death has changed

Description: This heavy book covered in black cloth—faded and worn away at the corners—is written in Latin at first, changes into more recognizable Middle English, and eventually, turns into current-day English. Each entry describes someone's death in vivid, graphic detail—often violent and always unpleasant.

The penultimate entry details how the last person who owned the book died. (If researched, all the deaths detailed occurred

If the Book of the Dead *is passed around and read by multiple people at once, the pages could contain multiple horrific predicted deaths in its final few entries; it doesn't change the fate of whoever passed the book off to someone else.*

The End, page 172

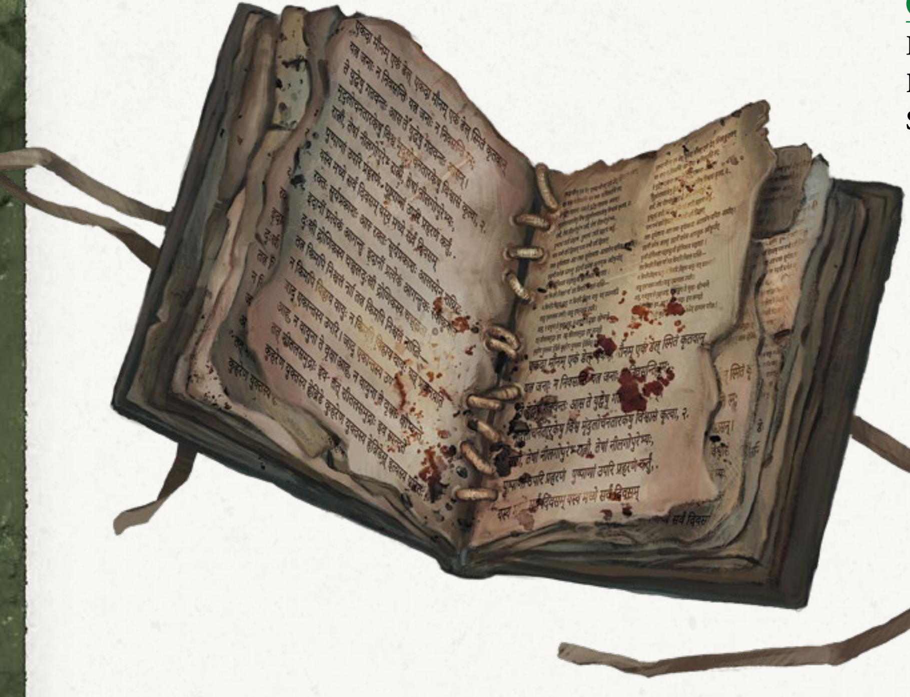
exactly as indicated.) The final entry predicts the unpleasant, terrifying death for the current reader about eleven years in the future.

The manner of a reader's predicted death changes each time they close and reopen the book, and the date is always about 20 percent closer than the previous date indicated. The updated death described is just as horrible, if not more so, than the previous one.

If enough time passes and the reader decides to forgo any more updates, events play out as most recently described. Someone with ties to other Entities could potentially save themself, though Avatars of The End become their bitter foes.

Fear: Instead of the date of the reader's death drawing closer by 20 percent the next time the book is checked, their demise is predicted as happening in the next three days.

> She leaned over the still form on the table and began to write, not in the book, but on the flesh of the woman she had killed. I could see even from my hiding place that her handwriting was cramped and messy, leaving some of the blue ink flowing off her subject like blood.
>
> After almost twenty minutes of hurried writing, she stepped back, apparently waiting for the ink to dry. She then retrieved a clean scalpel from her cabinet and, with a care she had not given the writing, she began to cut through the dead woman's back, peeling away the skin upon which she had written and leaving behind a small patch of flayed flesh.
>
> —MAG 62: "First Edition"



CATALOGUE OF THE TRAPPED DEAD

Level: 7

Related Entity: The End

Stress: 3 upon acquiring the book and realizing its power; 3 when undertaking the ritual to create a new page; 1 each time a spirit is questioned

Description: This large and misshapen book is composed of crudely prepared parchment pages handwritten in Sanskrit and other languages. Someone who tries reading a page succeeds even if they don't understand the language. Each page is an account of how a specific individual died.

Reading from a page causes the air to grow thick and heavy, with a scent like wet dirt. Then the individual whose death is described on that page appears in immaterial spirit form. The reader may question the spirit about anything it knew in life. The spirit isn't forced to answer, but instead may beg or bargain in return for its answers.

Many spirits bound to the book understand their situation, are in continual pain because of it, and desire release. If their page is removed and burned, the spirit is released (though if a removed page is retained, the spirit can be summoned from it at a later date).

A reader can learn from one of the spirits (or from another source) the ritual required for binding a fresh spirit of another person: kill them, ink their skin with a description of the death, cut that flap of skin away, hang it to dry, then stitch it into the book as a new page.

Fear: The Tome Hoarder appears and tries to recover the book, which she views as her property.

The Tome Hoarder, page 240

UNPLEASANT DEATHS

The following table offers inspiration for deaths predicted by the *Book of the Dead* or described on a particular page in the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead.*

d10	Predicted Death
1	Dragged under a car by driver who doesn't (or maybe does) realize they've hit anyone
2	Fall while alone into a bin or ravine where no one can find them
3	Beaten to death by someone who the reader currently thinks of as an ally
4	Choke to death while eating a meal
5	Eaten by spiders
6	Slowly crushed after a bookshelf of lore falls (or is pushed) onto them
7	Tortured to death by cultists
8	Boiled alive
9	Mostly eaten by a pile of meat
10	Cancer

> I opened the book, and for a few seconds was confused to see that nothing seemed to have changed. The writing was still unintelligible to me and it felt no different. I lifted it to have a closer look, and as I did I heard something clatter lightly onto the floor. I looked down to see bones. Small animal bones, from what I can tell, but each one was slightly bent and warped into shapes that bones should not form. As I stared at them, Mary Keay took the book back from me and passed it through the shadows once again. More bones fell. She did this several times, until there was a small pile formed at my feet.
>
> —MAG 4: "Page Turner"

DEAD ANIMALS

Level: 3

Related Entity: The Flesh

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book materializes bones

Description: This unremarkable-looking book is filled with Sanskrit poetry about dead animals. If passed through a shadow before being opened, a handful of slightly warped bones of birds, mice, gophers, voles, frogs, and other small animals patters to the floor. This process can be repeated; after a few repetitions during the encounter, Horror Mode is triggered, or, if it's already active, the range increases by 1 until the encounter ends.

Horror Mode, page 122

Fear: A nearby animal a character noticed is now gone, except for a small pile of fur, feathers, or scales.

> [. . .]this young man began scanning the shelves with an expression that seemed more like impatience. He was clearly looking for something specific, so after a few minutes I asked him if I could help. Without looking up, he said he was after a copy of de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal*, the older the better. I only had a 1908 translation in stock, but I said I would make enquiries if he wished for an older edition.
>
> —MAG 46: "Literary Heights"

DICTIONNAIRE INFERNAL

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 with each use

Description: Jacques Collin de Plancy's "Infernal Dictionary" was published in 1818, but this special, unique edition claims a publication date of 1908. Reading just a few words from the book eases the reader's tasks to perceive abnormal presences or influences for one hour, including those that are usually imperceptible to regular people or animals. However, tasks to hide from and/or defend against (as in, making defense rolls to resist) those same presences and influences are hindered for the same period.

Lightless beast, page 224
Greyling, page 220
Buried thing, page 204

Fear: An aspect of an Entity—such as a lightless beast, greyling, buried thing, or something else—is summoned by the book and attacks the reader.

> It was very strange. It was just the one word, solid capital letters in a small, neat typeface at the very centre of the page. It said 'DIG' . . . I took that to be the title, and turned to the next page. 'DIG.' Exactly the same. The third page. 'DIG.' The fourth page. 'DIG.' Dig, dig, dig, dig.
>
> Holding it hurt my hands. You know the way that if you say or read a word over and over again, it starts to lose all its meaning? To just sound like a jumble of noises or unrelated letters? Well this was the opposite. Every time I read it, it was like the meaning of the word became more solid in my mind. I knew what it was to find your meaning buried in the earth, to claw your sense from under the sand and mud and soil, to dig.
>
> —MAG 88: "Dig"

DIG

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Buried

Stress: 1 after reading a few pages; 1 each time a defense roll is failed against the book's compulsion to dig

Description: A fascination with digging gradually takes root in anyone who reads even a few pages. A sense of reaching a safe, happy place below, wrapped on all sides by uncounted miles of crushing, loving earth and stone. Of imagining the things that wait down there, a thousand terrible things, trapped and alone, out of air and out of light, all conjured by those three hideous letters: D I G. Despite the fear (or is it awe?), the reader continually grows more obsessed unless they succeed on three Intellect defense rolls (one each day) before failing three. If they fail three, they find a place to bury themself under the earth, or whatever's nearest, using their fingernails if no other tool is available. Those who accomplish this without anyone watching usually end up smothering beneath the earth.

Fear: The book's containment (whether a simple wrap or a metal box welded shut) is somehow disturbed, and the cover of the book becomes visible, its blurred letters inviting further inquiry by those who don't already understand the peril.

If someone compelled by DIG *tries to bury themselves but is saved by a third party, they gain three more Intellect defense rolls to try to purge themselves of the fascination.*

> `Hardly a book. Barely twelve pages. It is entitled *A Disappearance*. If read cover to cover, it removes one from the world. I cannot say precisely what that means, only that the assistant I assigned to it, Jacob Feng, was never seen again.`
>
> `—MAG 80: "The Librarian"`

A DISAPPEARANCE

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Lonely

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 with each use

Description: This short 1910 publication is titled simply *A Disappearance*. If just one or two words are read from the pamphlet, the reader becomes invisible and intangible, putting themselves beyond the reach even of spells and abilities normally able to see, find, and/or interact with hidden things. This state lasts until the reader chooses to reveal themself to another.

If read cover to cover (which only takes about a minute), the book removes the reader from the world (no defense roll). Those removed find themselves wandering completely alone in a misted, muted, mirror reflection of reality in the dimension of The Lonely. They take 1 point of Stress each hour they fail an Intellect defense roll. They can attempt an Intellect-based task each minute they spend searching for a way out. On a success, they appear within a few yards to a few miles of where they were lost.

The Lonely, page 174

Fear: Even if they don't mean to, the reader begins to read the pamphlet cover to cover on a failed Intellect defense roll.

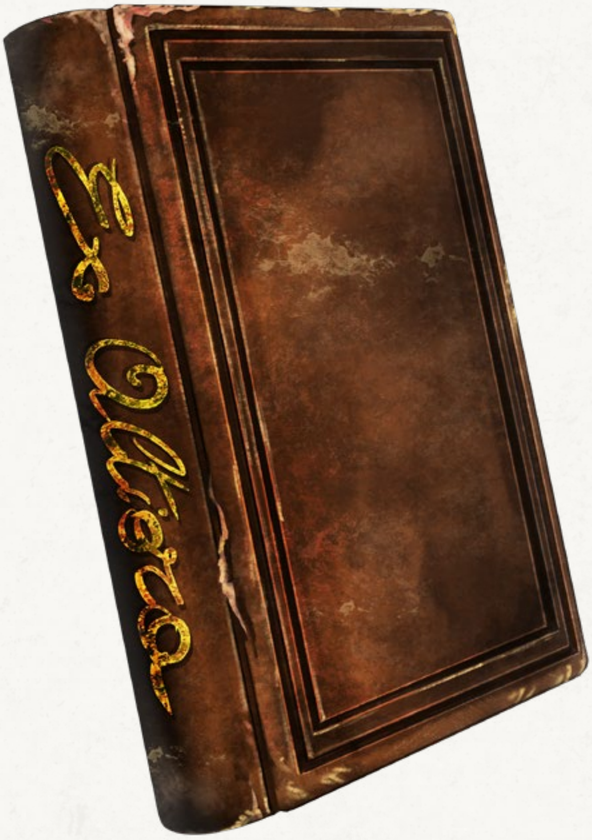
EX ALTIORA

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Vast

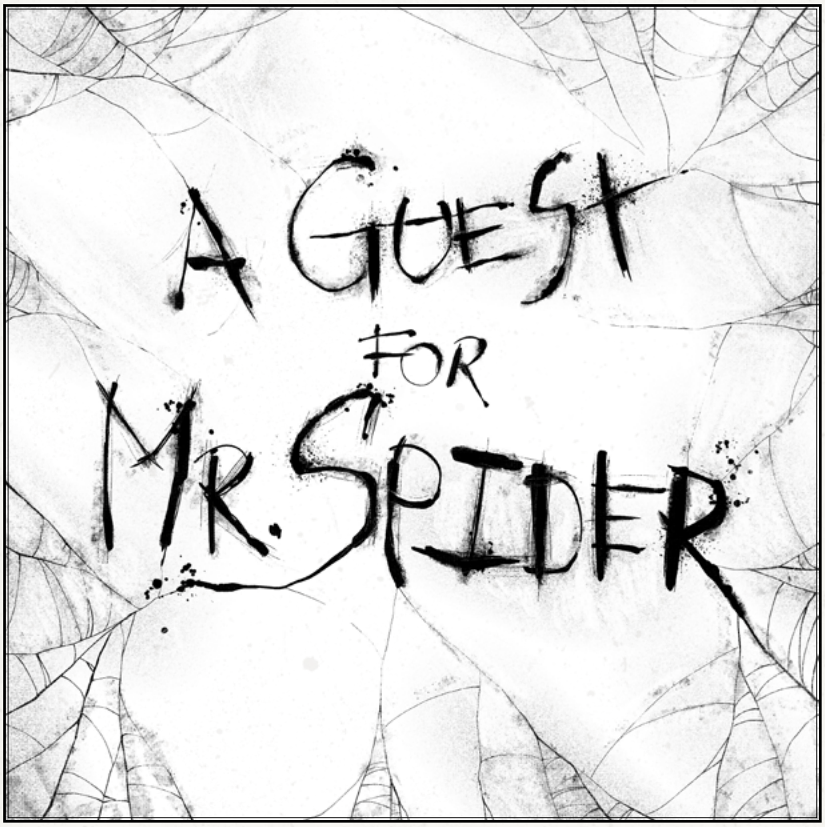
Stress: 3 each time the woodcut illustration of the clear night sky in the book is examined carefully

Description: Bound in calf leather, this volume is titled *Ex Altiora* in faded gold letters along the spine. Written entirely in Latin, the book is a long poem in the style of Virgil recounting a monstrous creature approaching an unnamed village on a cliff edge. The creature is so vast that its head and upper body are lost among the clouds. In the end, unable to deny the creature's impossible vastness, the villagers hurl themselves from the cliff onto the rocks far below.



> I had a flick through but it seemed to be entirely written in Latin, so I didn't have much luck discerning what it was about. The only English seemed to be a bookplate at the front that read "From the library of Jurgen Leitner" although no author was listed. There were also several black and white illustrations—woodcuts I think—each showing a mountain or a cliff or in one picture what appeared to be an empty night sky. I felt an odd sensation when I looked at that image as though, simple as it was, I was about to fall into it, and my stomach gave an odd jolt, almost causing me to drop the book in the middle of Oxfam.
>
> —MAG 4: "Page Turner"

The Vast, page 176


A GUEST FOR MR. SPIDER

The tome includes several black and white woodcuts of mountains, cliffs, the empty night sky, and similar themes. If the night sky woodcut is simply glanced at, the viewer briefly feels like they're about to fall into it (or just generally fall). If this illustration is examined carefully, the viewer must succeed on an Intellect defense roll. On a success, for seven days the reader can safely land from a fall of any height, taking only 3 points of Stress from the experience. Otherwise, they're afflicted with extreme vertigo for one hour, hindering all their physical tasks by three steps.

Fear: Someone making use of the beneficial effect granted by the tome finds themselves falling endlessly for an hour in an infinite-seeming layer of The Vast. They can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to end the effect; otherwise they gain 1 point of Stress every ten minutes.

A GUEST FOR MR. SPIDER

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 2 after reading the first scene (featuring Mr. Bluebottle) in the book; 1 for each scene the reader is forced to peruse thereafter

Description: Published in the style of a children's book, it begins with an illustration of Mr. Spider gesticulating in a mostly bare room with two doors. The story depicts a series of visitors through the left-hand door—the first being a fly named Mr. Bluebottle—who bring gifts that Mr. Spider doesn't like or is not fully satisfied with. Though not depicted, the implication is that Mr. Spider eats each visitor.

Someone who reads the first scene with Mr. Bluebottle must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or be compelled to read the next scene (assuming no outside influence stops them or takes the book). After finishing each scene, the reader gains another Intellect defense roll to stop reading. The scenes feature (1) Mr. Bluebottle, (2) Mrs. Fruit, (3) Mr. Horse and his son, and finally (4)

> Instead of the garish colours that I expected, the cover was monochrome, matt white with scratchy black webs covering its corners, and in the middle of the cover, half-written, half-carved in a childlike hand was the title: *A Guest for Mr. Spider.*
>
> On the back cover there was no blurb, just a crudely sketched image of what I assumed to be the eponymous Mr. Spider. He stood upright on his spindly back legs, attached to a disproportionately swollen abdomen. The rest of his legs were splayed at odd angles, as though in the middle of some sort of dance, and his head had no mouth, but was covered asymmetrically with eight eyes of all shapes and sizes. On the top of it there sat a small bowler hat, which had been drawn in a splash of red ink, unlike the black and white which made up the rest of the image.
>
> —MAG 81: "A Guest for Mr. Spider"

on the second-to-last page, a close-up of the right-hand door with a cutaway panel that can be opened onto the final page, accompanied by the text, "MR. SPIDER WANTS ANOTHER GUEST FOR DINNER. IT IS POLITE TO KNOCK."

If the reader fails the Intellect defense roll upon viewing the second-to-last page, they are compelled to travel to a nearby dwelling (or temporary digs) where a monstrously sized spider-shaped aspect of The Web secretly waits for someone to knock. Someone who does is attacked and drawn into the dwelling. If they can't escape, they're eaten.

Fear: Wherever someone who's read even a single page of the book goes, they notice a spider somewhere watching them. It always looks like the same spider.

> She took Sarah to the woods with a strange book of astronomy and suggested she go and chart the stars. The brave stargazer stayed beneath the canopy, and never quite lost herself to the cosmos, though sometimes when Emma looked into her eyes she could still see a reflection of uncanny constellations.
>
> —MAG 167: "Curiosity"

INFINITY ABOVE: A BOOK OF ASTRONOMY

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Vast

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book is mostly composed of strange constellations; 1 each time a reader gains the ability to see in the dark

Description: This modern-looking coffee table book is filled with constellation images, apparently taken by cutting-edge space telescopes and color-corrected. However, anyone with knowledge of astronomy who peruses the book is likely to grow puzzled as the constellations shown after the first few don't correspond with any known on Earth, with names like Corpse King, The Bellowing, Whispering Skulls, and Fang in the Night.

A reader who realizes that most of the book details uncanny constellations (or a less savvy reader who flips through a handful of pages) gains the ability to see in the dark for a day, and whether it's day or night, they can see the stars overhead wherever they are (even if inside or underground). During this period, a reflection of those uncanny constellations is visible in their eyes.

Fear: Someone who has read from and still owns the book is whisked up into what at first seems like outer space, though it's actually a layer of The Vast filled with air and unbounded by anything but distant, strange, wheeling constellations. The reader can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round, and if they succeed on three before failing on three, they return to the world. If they fail three defense rolls before succeeding on three, they spin through strange space forever (until rescued).

Aspect of The Web: *level 6; attacks with webbing that wraps around target on a hit; grabbed target takes a serious injury each round until they escape; slain foes are reanimated as bewebbed puppets (page 200)*

MARTIN: So-So-S-Sorry, that guy was Jurgen Leitner?

ELIAS: It was.

BASIRA: Daisy, where do I know that name from?

DAISY: Oh, the Yousuf case. *An Introduction to Higher Anatomy.*

BASIRA: Ah . . . Oh, god! And you killed him? You sure we shouldn't be giving him a medal?

ARCHIVIST: Very sure.

—MAG 92: "Nothing Beside Remains"

AN INTRODUCTION TO HIGHER ANATOMY

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Flesh

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 3 the first time a reader samples human brain

Description: This text from the early 1900s is a study of the nervous system and brain, emphasizing their functions and complexity compared to other organs, though it's primitive by modern standards. If a reader opens the book and skims a page or two, they must succeed on an Intellect defense roll, or fascination leads them to read the whole thing from beginning to end, unless they are stopped by an outside force. This requires a couple of hours.

Upon completing the book, the reader begins experiencing numbness, tingling, and weakness in the hands and feet, hindering their physical tasks. They come to suspect they can cure this affliction if they consume uncontaminated nerve tissue—ideally, brains. This suspicion is borne out; however, it turns out that animal brains provide relief for only a few hours. Human brains, they are somehow sure, will cure the affliction. And they're right.

If a reader can refrain from reading the whole book and stop after just a page or two, they ease their Intellect defense rolls by two steps for one day.

Fear: Human brains relieve the affliction for about a month, then it returns. More brains must be consumed, a cycle that repeats itself. Over time, the period of relief grows shorter and shorter.

I found *The Journal of a Plague Year* when I was seventeen. I was lucky, I suppose, that it wasn't anything worse. It infected the house, of course, brought it crashing down upon my parents in a collapse of diseased brick and septic foundations, but I escaped. And more than that, my eyes were opened to the powers that might save me.

—MAG 91: "The Coming Storm"

A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Corruption

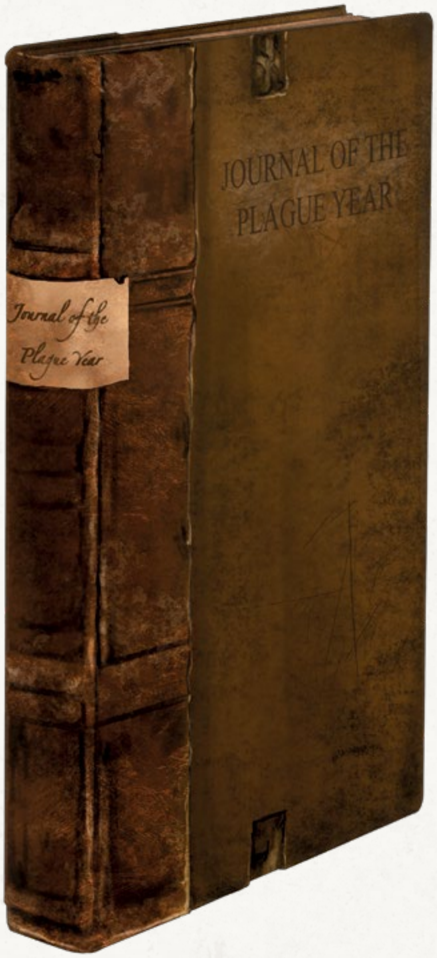
Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 with each use

Description: This volume is a unique copy of Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, an eighteenth-century novel about the bubonic plague in London. If even a couple of pages are perused, the reader becomes immune to disease and poison for seven days; however, if they fail a Might defense roll, they become the carrier of a new airborne pathogen for the same period. As a carrier, they suffer no symptoms. Someone familiar with the tome (or who has identified it) understands this and can try to keep to themselves for the period. Otherwise, anyone the carrier comes within immediate range of must succeed on a Might defense roll or contract the disease and immediately gain 2 points of Stress. Each day the affected target fails a Might defense roll, they suffer a serious injury. If the target succeeds on three such rolls, they gradually improve and throw off the sickness.

Alternatively, someone with the tome can take the disease from another infected person. In this case, the subject is cured, but the owner of the tome becomes a carrier for a virulent version of that disease (treat as just described).

If the tome is left continuously open and unattended for more than a day in the same location, the building housing it becomes infected. This "structural disease" resembles the progression of diseases that normally affect living things, leading to lesions, weakness, and (within seven days of the initial infection) a complete collapse of the building into so much rotted wood and powdered stone.

Fear: The reader risks catching the disease they were previously the carrier for (and supposedly recovered from) unless they read a few more pages to generate another new pathogen.


JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR
Journal of the Plague Year

> `My first job was working with Jurgen Leitner, but I got out of that years before the man met his fate. Started looking for the exit about the time that I saw Warren get literally eaten by a book. And before you start cross-referencing, looking for some newly-birthed monster called Warren, I don't mean eaten like that. It left behind the leg. Don't know any transformations that leave behind your leg.`
>
> `—MAG 115: "Taking Stock"`

THE JOY OF EATING

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Flesh

Stress: 1 each time someone understands a recipe; 3 if the book tries to eat the chef

Description: The image on the colorful wrapper of this large hardcover resembles many popular modern cookbooks. However, a closer look reveals that the "happy" chef shown in the image isn't actually smiling or laughing, but grimacing in mortal terror.

The reader must succeed on an Intellect defense roll to fully understand any given recipe each time they attempt to make it. If successful, and they make that recipe that day, the resulting dish grants anyone who eats it a free one-action recovery roll (they can only gain this benefit once per day). (All the recipes in the book use meat.)

Recovery roll, page 135

Fear: The book begins eating the reader, starting with their hands, drawing them in a few inches at a time, chewing away with horribly gnashing letters that are also somehow teeth. Each round the character fails a Might defense roll, they take a serious injury. If the reader succeeds on three Might defense rolls before dying, they manage to pull free.

> ARCHIVIST: Like *The Key of Solomon*?
>
> LEITNER: That one was a mistake. I thought that, in the tunnels, there might be the stability to examine it properly, learn something of the forces arrayed against us. But it went wrong. We had to destroy it. I should have known, really. It was one of the few volumes that contained elements of several different powers.
>
> —MAG 80: "The Librarian"

THE KEY OF SOLOMON

Level: 6

Related Entity: Potentially all the Entities

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's true nature; 1 for each attempt to summon a monster

Description: This tome appears to be something of an almanac on demonology. Apparently, it's a special English-translated edition of a grimoire attributed to King Solomon. However, further perusal reveals it's a treatise on the Entities. Someone who searches through the book for a minute per specific question eases a related knowledge task made to understand the Entities (and their related Avatars and aspects).

The Entities, page 166

The Slaughter, page 174

Chapter 12: Monsters and NPCs, page 192

Someone could also attempt to use this book to summon and command a monster (of up to level 5) related to an Entity. Doing so requires reading from the book for one minute and succeeding on an Intellect-based roll (eased by having read this tome and other skills related to performing sorcery). If the character is successful, the monster appears in a fashion matching its idiom (slipping from the shadows if of The Dark, animating from a corpse if of The End, and so on) and does as the summoner asks until the task is concluded or one day passes, whichever is sooner.

Fear: The monster doesn't listen to the summoner and instead attacks the nearest ally with the lowest Might, or, after finishing its commanded task, it returns and attempts to destroy the summoner.

KILLER'S SONG

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Slaughter

Stress: 3 upon understanding and claiming the book; 1 with each use (successful or not)

Description: This paperback, old and unloved, shows obvious signs of neglect. The story follows an unnamed character through a series of violent encounters that escalate in their intensity and brutality. The protagonist is at first reluctant but, as the story proceeds, grows eager for each new conflict. The purpose for the character's journey is never really explained, and the story ends with their gruesome death.

After identifying the book, the reader realizes they can read a few pages to improve their chances in a fight, easing their attack rolls for about an hour if they succeed on a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task.

On a failed task, the reader is driven to attack any and every living creature within short range with whatever weapon is close at hand, including improvised weapons like broken glass and shovels. Affected individuals can attempt an Intellect defense roll each round to regain their senses.

Fear: An affected individual tears *Killer's Song* clean in two down the spine, releasing an invisible manifestation of The Slaughter that enters everyone in very long range who fails an Intellect defense roll. This causes them to attack everyone and everything within short range until nothing is left but themselves, which they then treat just as cruelly. An affected individual can attempt another Intellect defense roll each round to end the effect before they kill someone else or themself.

> Spencer didn't exactly help matters by getting himself suspended. The only thing Diego Molina had on him when we brought him in was a small book bound in red leather. They caught Spencer in Storage, trying to destroy it with a Zippo lighter. I never saw him again.
>
> They told me he killed himself when he got home. Apparently he'd somehow filled the bath full of boiling water and just . . . just got in. Official story was he'd somehow done it using a kettle, which . . . that, that's just about the weakest cover-up I've ever heard.
>
> —MAG 43: "Section 31"

ROARING DESOLATION

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Desolation

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 3 each day the book's owner doesn't burn anything

Description: This small book bound in red leather contains a series of verses in a biblical style celebrating a higher power called "The Lightless Flame" and describing how its stark, everlasting, terrifying glory can be experienced through cleansing, eternal fire.

After reading a few pages from the book, the reader grows supernaturally fascinated with fire. Each day they don't burn something new, they gain 3 points of Stress that can't be recovered until something is burned. Burning the same thing over and over (such as a cigarette) doesn't help after the first one. If the book's owner successfully passes it to someone else, or rids themselves of the book in some other permanent fashion (by throwing it into the middle of the ocean, sealing it in concrete, etc.), the fascination with fire leaves them.

Fear: The book's owner thinks it's a good idea to begin burning parts (or all) of themself and, on a failed Intellect defense roll, does exactly that.

> "It saw me," Allan keeps saying, over and over again, "It saw me through the pages. And it's coming." He sees it, he says, in every mirror, every distant doorway, a silhouette on every skyline. Coming closer each and every time, finding its way towards him, step by step. "It has no eyes," Allan sobs, "so it has to feel its way towards me. But it knows. It knows!" Elias has no way to comfort him. He can't even understand what he's talking about.
>
> —MAG 193: "A Stern Look"

SEEN

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 3 upon becoming fascinated with the book; 1 each time someone tries to tell the fascinated reader that the pages are blank

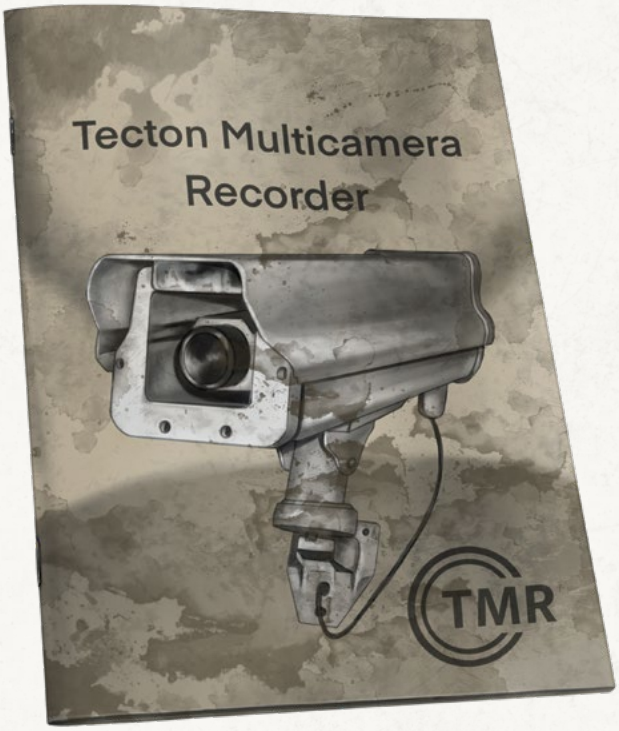
Description: This old, crumbling book is lightly titled on the spine in flaking grey letters. The pages inside are all blank, but someone who looks through it must succeed on an Intellect defense roll or become fascinated with it. An affected reader believes it to contain a revolutionary treatise, philosophy, religion, science, or other important thing that they have an interest in, and they have a hard time thinking and talking about anything else, hindering all Intellect-based tasks. The fascinated reader can attempt another Intellect roll each day that someone else tries to convince them the pages are blank, and if they succeed on three rolls, their fascination ends.

Fear: A watcher's husk rises in a distant tomb and begins, slowly but surely, stalking the reader. The reader can see it coming every time they close their eyes.

Watcher's husk, page 245

> Ok, so this is the part that you're definitely going to think I'm having a joke with you, but I'm honestly not. I'm dead serious. Cos I saw some of the pages over his shoulder, and on one of them, there was . . . There was a picture of me, like a black and white photo of my face. I didn't get a good look, but it certainly wasn't one that I remember having had taken, not that that would make it any less weird for it to be printed in an old CCTV manual from back when I was still in nappies. But I'm not making it up, I swear. Then Samson turned and looked at me and, I don't know, I got real spooked. His eyes were all messed up, like weird and glassy. It was really, really freaky, and I just turned and I got out of there.
>
> —MAG 148: "Extended Surveillance"

Horror Mode, page 122



SECURITY CAMERA INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Level: 6

Related Entity: The Eye

Stress: 2 upon seeing one's own face; 3 upon realizing the manual's abilities; 1 with each use of the manual

Description: This ten-page pamphlet purporting to be an instruction manual for a Tecton multicamera recorder is yellowed, water damaged, and well used. (Someone even put their name in the front, though the handwriting is too poor and blurred with age to definitively make out.) A person who glances through the manual has even odds of seeing a black and white photo of their face printed inside. Someone who identifies or studies it realizes they can use the following abilities while in possession of the manual, whether or not they have authorized access to nearby security cameras, or even access to a terminal, laptop, or phone. However, each time an ability is used, Horror Mode is triggered, or, if already active, the range increases by 1 until the end of the day (or encounter, whichever is longer).

- The manual owner can use their action to see out of any camera within very long range.
- The manual owner can delete or insert visual and audio information in digital security camera footage collected by any camera within very long range. The change can be up to a couple of rounds in length per use.

Fear: The manual owner becomes fascinated with it and with watching everyone else using electronic surveillance, so much so that getting them to engage in their regular activities is difficult. The fascinated manual owner can attempt an Intellect roll each day that someone else tries to convince them that their behavior is weird, and if they succeed on three rolls, their fascination ends. If they fail three before that (or fail to attempt any rolls for three days), they are bodily consumed by the nearest CCTV security system, where their spirit remains and watches forevermore.

`LEITNER: You're quite like her, you know. I suppose that's no surprise. Anyway, your questions?`
`ARCHIVIST: Right. Let's start with what you did down there. How you . . . trapped it.`
`LEITNER: An unexpurgated copy of Ruskin's` *`The Seven Lamps of Architecture`*`, published in 1845. Of course, Ruskin didn't even begin writing the book until 1846, and the text of this one varies markedly from the version that was distributed. It gives an acute sense of the walls pressing in around you, and if consumed recklessly, will physically entomb the reader.`

`—MAG 80: "The Librarian"`

THE SEVEN LAMPS OF ARCHITECTURE

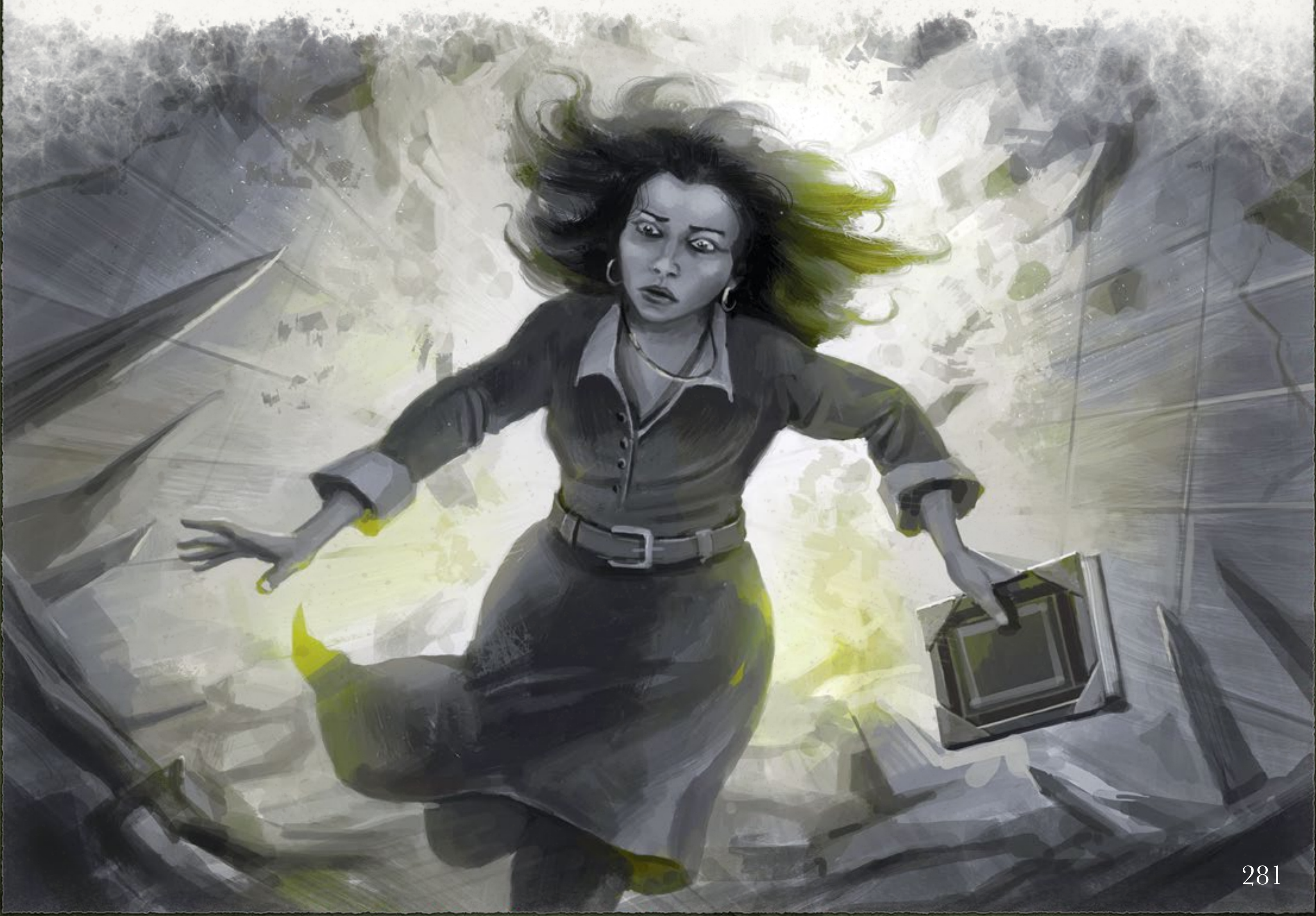
Level: 6

Related Entity: The Buried

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's abilities; 1 each time the reader feels like the walls are pressing in; 1 each time an ability from the book is used

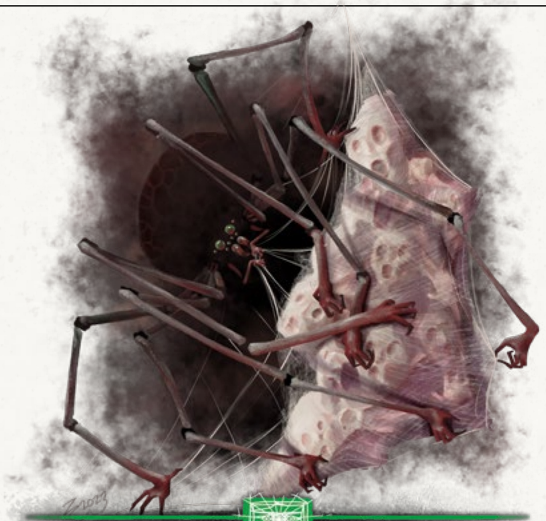
Description: This anachronistic edition of *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* by John Ruskin includes handwritten marginalia (penned by at least two people, one named Robert Smirke, the other Jurgen Leitner). Someone touching or reading the book while inside a structure must succeed on a Might defense roll or begin suffering from troubled breathing and feeling as if the walls are pressing in around them, hindering their physical tasks until they leave the structure for about a minute.

A reader who identifies the book realizes they can use the following abilities while in possession of it.



- The book owner can find their way through a structure or artificial tunnel they are in, as long as they know of the room or area—or person or object—they want to reach. To do this, they must concentrate for a few rounds and succeed on an Intellect-based task equal to the level of the structure they wish to navigate, or the level of the object or person they wish to find.
- The book owner can reshape the architecture of a building or artificial tunnel they're in after reading from the book for one round. To do this, they make an attack roll, and on a success, someone they can see inside the same structure is trapped as the walls shift and close them off. To escape, the trapped person must overcome a level 6 doorless room (or, in some cases, a maze) or wait until someone with the same book or ability lets them out.

Fear: The book is read too recklessly—perhaps by being flipped through, or maybe its abilities are called on too frequently—and the reader is entombed in the walls within a lightless cavity too narrow for them to move (or to read from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*).



> Out of all the many and varied quirks of Dexter Banks, his minor obsession with a Japanese spider movie that may or may not have ever existed was one of the least unpleasant. At least until I got the call about his final project. He told me over the phone that he was producing a new film, that it was going to be his masterpiece. Then he started to describe it, and I don't know how much of what I felt was déjà vu and how much was just dread. I asked if he had found a copy of the film, or a script, but he just laughed. "Better," he said. "I found the book it was based on."
>
> —MAG 110: "Creature Feature"

SPIDERS ARE EATING

Spiders Are Eating *supposedly inspired a 1960s-era Japanese film of the same name:* Kumo Ga Tabete Iru.

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Web

Stress: 1 the first time the novella is read; 1 after realizing spiders are drawn to the book

Description: This thin hardcover tells the tale of spiders (from normal-sized specimens to those the size of houses) attacking and eating, over time, everyone in a small town. Otherwise the tome seems normal enough, until the owner realizes that whenever the book is left alone for more than a few hours, a handful of spiders are found crawling on it—even if there was no way for them to get into an enclosure holding the book.

After about a week in a new owner's home or collection, the book manifests a monstrous spider—nearly twice the size of a person—into the nearest basement, cellar, or other hidden location. The monstrous spider stalks people in the vicinity, webbing them up and eating them at its leisure. It stalks the owner after everyone else nearby has been eaten, unless it is defeated (at which point the monstrous spider crumbles to blowing dust and cobwebs).

Monstrous spider: *level 4, stealth as level 7; climbs a short distance each round; immediate-range web attack catches a target on a failed Speed defense roll, preventing them from taking physical actions until they can escape; unless distracted, the spider spins another web layer over the caught target each round, hindering escape tasks by an additional step each time*

Fear: An NPC the owner knows is discovered completely cocooned in spiderwebs, dry and drained of blood.

THE STALWART HUNTERS' ALMANAC

Level: 4

Related Entity: The Flesh and The Hunt

Stress: 2 each time a topic in the almanac is perused; 1 each time knowledge gained from reading the almanac is put to use

Description: This leatherbound book is filled with hunting anecdotes, all grisly. Some focus on hunting animals, while a few seem to be about hunting people. Most such hunts include a wrap-up scene describing how the prey was slaughtered in preparation for a meal.

If an anecdote is read (requiring about ten minutes) and the reader succeeds on a difficulty 4 Intellect-based task to understand it, their tracking tasks are eased for one day.

Fear: A manifestation of The Flesh and The Hunt identifies the reader as its prey, and if and when it catches them, it does terrible things to them, as described in the almanac.

THE TALE OF A FIELD HOSPITAL

Level: 5

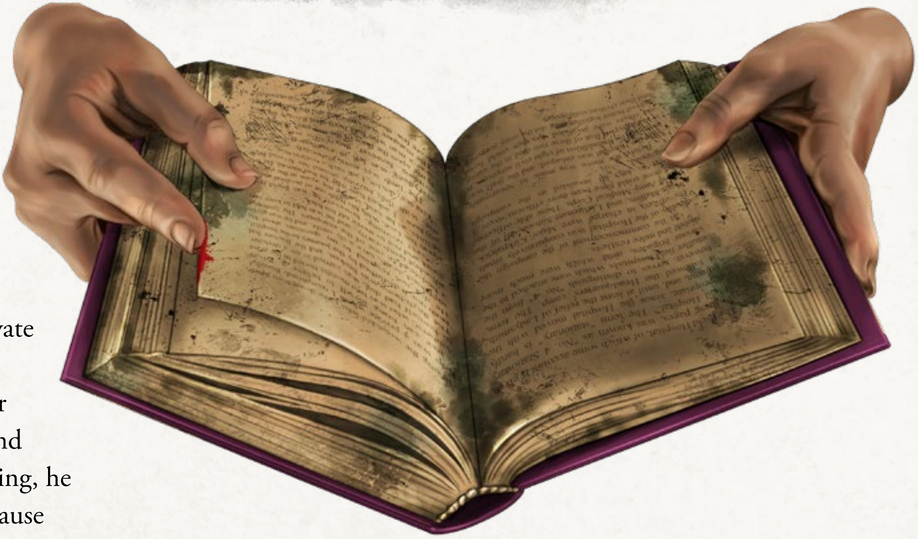
Related Entity: The Corruption

Stress: 1 from each papercut; 3 upon realizing the papercut is horribly infected

Description: This book by Sir Frederick Treves describes his experiences during the Second Boer War. However, the age of the tome and the fact that many of its pages have different ink weights or layouts (perhaps indicating they were printed at different times) suggest it's a proofing or draft copy. Moreover, the anecdotes in this volume vary in tone and content more than in the published version, often with death coming suddenly due to some kind of sepsis, fever, or other unknown but usually gruesome disease. A recurring character in the book is Private Amherst, who succumbs to smallpox, only to reappear later with some other ailment that ultimately claims him, and then once more. However, in his passing, he intimates that it's not permanent, because "[...] you see, doctor, I am such a restless man."

Fear: The reader gets a papercut from the book's pages, which quickly leads to putrefaction. The affected reader must succeed on a Might defense roll each day against the rapidly progressing disease or suffer a serious injury. If they succeed three times before dying, they survive the disease, though possibly only because they lost a finger, hand, or arm to amputation in order to stop the putrefaction from reaching their heart.

> He dragged his rifle along with him, his belt was gone, his helmet was poised at the back of his head, his tunic was thrown over his shoulders; he was literally black with flies.
>
> He told me he had come from the concentration camps, that there were many among the Boers that shared his state, and that he longed to touch me with all that we had visited upon them. He talked of disease, putrefaction, and the writhing creatures of filth. He breathlessly talked of his revelation. Then he died, as did the man who came to bury him.
>
> —MAG 68: "The Tale of a Field Hospital"



> GERARD: So, what's the verdict?
> GERTRUDE: Hm?
> GERARD: On *The Travels*.
> GERTRUDE: Oh— Burn it, I think. You said Mr. Hampton was dead?
> GERARD: Yep—and *not* peacefully.
> —MAG 162: "A Cosy Cabin"

THE TRAVELS

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Spiral

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 with each use

Description: An account of Ibn Battuta of his long and varied travels prior to 1354. Unlike the original manuscript (which is in Arabic), this English translation is a pale blue leatherbound book with gold leaf embossing. Once it's identified, a reader can use this tome to begin a trip to a location they have previously personally visited or that they know to exist. This requires reading from the tome for at least one minute, then going through the nearest closed door. If they succeed on a difficulty 5 Intellect roll, the windowless corridors beyond lead to their intended destination after another minute or so of walking. If the reader fails their roll, the door opens to wherever it normally goes.

Fear: The reader opens a door and passes into a windowless corridor papered with a swirling green pattern and lit by wall lamps. A thick black rug runs down the center of the faded yellow carpet. Mirrors and paintings dot the walls. The paintings depict the same corridor from odd angles. The reader soon realizes they're lost in a maze. They can attempt to escape each minute with an Intellect-based roll. If they succeed, they find a door or break a mirror that leads out, but each failure inflicts 1 point of Stress.

The Spiral, page 175

A traveler who dies in the passages is spit out of the door they entered just a few minutes after they went through it, even if the victim spent subjective days or weeks inside the maze.

WHISPERS IN WHITE MATTER

Level: 5

Related Entity: The Spiral

Stress: 3 upon realizing the book's power; 1 each time the book is purposefully used to add or delete a memory

Description: The title to this scuffed and bulky journal is written on the cover in black marker. The interior pages contain a series of handwritten journal entries. However, perusal quickly reveals that multiple people appear to have written in this journal. At this realization, the reader must succeed on an Intellect defense roll. On a failed roll, the last entry read disappears from the book and appears in the reader's mind as if it was their own memory.

Once someone understands how to use the book, they can selectively delete memories from their own minds by writing them down, or pick up other memories that have been written in the book (though it's difficult to know what a new memory will be until an entry is read).

In addition, the book owner can spend a couple of rounds of uninterrupted writing, then attempt an Intellect attack roll against someone else within short range. On a success, the writer can delete a simple memory from that person or give them a simple made-up memory.

Fear: A particularly horrifying journal entry is read, detailing how the entry writer became more and more lost in an endless maze of corridors (of The Spiral), which becomes the reader's new memory. On a failed Intellect defense roll, until a third party removes that memory from the reader, they are catatonic, wandering The Spiral in their memories.

CHAPTER 14

RUNNING THE GAME

> My father was a murderer. There's no way I can reasonably deny it at this point; the evidence provided by the police was overwhelming and I saw his shed myself. I'm not here to try and clear his name. There wouldn't be much point anyway as I'm sure you know he died in prison last year. Seven years isn't much to have served out of a life sentence but I doubt it was the early parole he'd have hoped for.
>
> —MAG 9: "A Father's Love"

If you're going to be the game master (GM) in your Magnus Archives RPG, you've got some things to keep in mind. It's not always easy, but it's not as bad as you might think. And it's certainly rewarding.

In this chapter, we're going to talk about the rules and how the GM can use them. We'll also discuss interacting with players, running games, and crafting great stories.

As in *The Magnus Archives* podcast, the key to fun in the RPG is the creation of a good story. Eliciting chills, excitement, and wonder should be the goal of every GM in every game session.

THE GM'S ROLE

The players provide the main characters of the story. You provide everything else. If they have to climb a wall to escape a pursing pile of meat and bone with eyes, you tell them how high the wall is and how difficult it is to climb. If they have to explore an abandoned subway station looking for a beast made of darkness, you determine what's inside, and if it turns out there are occupants, maybe including lightless beasts, you control their actions.

In addition, the GM is the source of knowledge about the parts of the PCs' lives that don't take place in a game session. If a character used to be in the military and needs to know the name of their old unit commander, you need to give it to the player (or, better yet, let the player come up with the name).

You're the narrator, the bad guys, all the minor characters, and a sort of referee all in one.

An RPG is a game of conversation, back and forth. In broad strokes, it goes something like this:

1. You tell the players what their characters see and hear.

2. One at a time, the players tell you what they want to do in response to what you told them.

3. You determine their chance of success or failure, one at a time. If there's a chance of failure, you determine the difficulty of their action and ask them to roll a die.

If you're a Rusty Quill fan but have never played a tabletop RPG before, check out the Rusty Quill Gaming podcast so you can listen to a game and learn the basics of what to expect. Just remember this is a different system, so the rules are a little different!

4. The players roll dice, and together you determine what happens as a result.

5. Based on what just happened, you tell the players what their characters see and hear (including, perhaps, what actions the NPCs take).

6. The players tell you what they want to do.

And so on.

You need to have the answers to a few questions ready:

1. Where will things start? Be ready to set the scene at the beginning of the session. You are entirely in control over where this is and what's going on. The players will look to you for information and guidance.

Chapter 9: The Statement, page 157

Ideally, you'll use a statement to get things rolling.

2. What will the characters do? From that initial scene, the players will take action. They'll likely go somewhere else. You need to be ready to describe these new locations. They'll talk to people, explore places, move things, start fights, run from danger, sneak, surrender, find clues, and a million other things. You can't plan for everything, but you should be ready—in a very general sense—for the kinds of things they might do. If the adventure takes place in another city, for example, you need to have a few options for travel, with obstacles that might get in their way, and an idea of what things will be like when they arrive. For example, maybe the small town they want to investigate is hosting a circus with uncanny exhibits.

3. Who will the characters meet? PCs in this game start off almost every investigation by talking to people they learn about in the statement. There will likely be more than one person to question. You need to have an idea of what they look like and what they might know when the PCs ask them questions. If the PCs investigate an old house with a monster within, you have to be ready with an idea of what (or who) is in the house and how they will react to intruders. And of course, NPCs need stats.

For instance, aside from anyone else in the house the PCs want to question, maybe you've decided that The Man Who Wasn't There is also . . . not there.

4. What will the characters discover? In every adventure or session, the PCs should discover something new. Discovery keeps things moving forward. Maybe it's an old book, like *Killer's Song*. Maybe it's information. Maybe it's insight into the Entities. Whatever it is, you'll be the one to provide the details.

THE GM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PLAYERS

You are the players' guide into the fictional world. You provide the setting, the plots, and all the characters not created by them. You manage and adjudicate the rules and help resolve every action. That's a lot of responsibility, but it's fun too.

Your job as arbiter and referee—as well as the fact that you know a lot of information that the players don't—sometimes gives a skewed perspective of your overall role. You might manage the rules and build the world, but you aren't in charge of the whole experience. You aren't the "god" of the game with special powers over the players. It's a group activity. The players aren't there to be entertained solely by you, nor are they there for your amusement.

Sure, you might have created an amazing plot, but it's all for naught if you don't have quality players. It's good to feel strongly connected to your creations, but give the players credit for *their* creations too.

The game needs to be fun for everyone at the table, but remember that includes you. You have to enjoy yourself and your time with the players or there's a problem that needs to be fixed.

IMPARTIALITY

It's important that you try to remain as impartial as you can when running the game. Favoring one player over another, intentional or not, is always pretty obvious, even if you think you're hiding it. Giving one player more attention, giving them more generous rules interpretations, giving them more treasure or character abilities—the group will notice you doing this, even if you don't notice it yourself. If you're in a situation where you might be tempted to do this (your significant other is one of the players, for example), be extra vigilant that you don't.

Similarly, don't be adversarial to the players. You want to be impartial when it comes to the NPCs and the story. If you treat the game as a contest of the GM versus the players, that detracts from the goal of joint storytelling, and frankly it's outright absurd, because at any moment you could declare that The End succeeded and say, "Everyone's dead." That's not fun for anyone, obviously, but it shows how silly an adversarial relationship is.

What you *can* do is have a playful attitude of "I'm making this really challenging for you." This isn't adversarial, just a way to—on a metagame level—inject a bit of tension into the game. When the PCs are victorious, the players will feel even greater satisfaction from believing that you pushed them to their limits.

YOU'RE NOT THE GROUP'S COUNSELOR

If there's a disagreement between players or a player is causing a problem, it's not your responsibility alone to handle it. You should, when appropriate, be part of the solution, but it's the whole group's duty to make sure that things go smoothly and everyone has a good time.

The Man Who Wasn't There, page 226

Killer's Song, page 278

THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES GM

The Magnus Archives RPG has been designed to make the challenging tasks of game mastering as simple as possible and allow you as the GM to focus on what's important. Rather than dealing with a lot of die rolls, modifiers, and rules minutiae, you can focus mainly on the flow of the story. This is not to say that you are the sole storyteller. The group is the storyteller. But it's the GM's job to pull together the actions, reactions, and desires of all the people sitting around the table, mesh them with the setting and background created before the session began, and turn it all into a cohesive story—on the fly. Sometimes this means using a heavy hand. Sometimes it means stepping back. Sometimes it means being open-minded. It always means giving the other players as much of the spotlight as you have as the GM, and attempting to give it to each of them in turn so that no one person dominates the narrative or the gameplay—not even you.

The rules are your tools to tell a story, to portray a character, and to simulate your world. The rules are not the final word—you are. You are not subservient to the rules. But you do have a master. That master is fun gameplay mixed with exciting story.

The GMs who recognize that they are not subservient to the rules might feel forced to work against the rules, to work in spite of the rules, or to use the rules as smoke and mirrors to cover up what they're really doing (which is providing everyone with an exciting, compelling, and interesting narrative in which to participate). Hopefully, as a GM, you won't find that to be the case. On the contrary, most of the rules were designed to make it easier to run the game—or rather, to allow the GM to focus on helping to shepherd a great story.

THE RULES VERSUS THE STORY

> It took me a moment to recognize Callum McKenzie, holding out his pitchfork as he looked over his croft. But no, the angle was wrong. He wasn't holding his pitchfork, he was just gripping the handle, and I realized with a jolt that the sharp tines were buried in his stomach. From this angle, I could just about make out the ends of them protruding from his back, and suddenly everything seemed very still.
>
> —MAG 125: "Civilian Casualties"

On first glance, it might seem that for a story-based game, there isn't a lot of "story" in the rules. A wall, a silver worm, a pit to leap, and a gun can be more or less summed up as a single number—their level. The thing is, this is a story-based game *because* the rules at their core are devoid of story. A wall, a silver worm, a pit to leap, and a gun can be summed up as levels because they're all just parts of the story. They're all just obstacles or tools.

There aren't a lot of specifics in the rules—no guidelines for particular judo moves or the differences between repairing a movie projector and fixing a lorry or semi-truck. That's not because those kinds of things are to be ignored, but because they are flavor—they are story, description, and elaboration for the GM and the players to provide. A player running a character in a fistfight can and should describe one attack as an uppercut and another as a roundhouse punch, even though there's no mechanical difference. In fact, *because* there's no mechanical difference. That's what a narrative game is all about. It's interesting and entertaining, and that's why you're all sitting at the table in the first place.

If different aspects of the game—walls, silver worms, pits, and so on—have distinctions, they come through as story elements, which are special exceptions to the rules. Having so few general rules makes adding special conditions and situations easier, because there is less rules tinkering to deal with. Fewer special circumstances to worry about. Less chance of contradictions and rules incompatibilities. For example, you can easily have a mystic barrier that can be destroyed only by mental force. A greyling has its special grab attack. A pit could have very slippery walls. The Chosen of Flame burns things with her touch. These are story elements that mechanically build on the very simple base mechanics, and they all make things more interesting.

SETTING DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The GM's most important overall tasks are setting the stage and guiding the story created by the group (not the one created by the GM ahead of time). But setting difficulty is the most important mechanical task the GM has in the game. Although there are suggestions throughout this chapter for various difficulty ratings for certain actions, there is no master list of the difficulty for every action a PC can take. Instead, the system is designed with the "teach a person to fish" style of good game mastering in mind. (If you don't know what that means, it comes from the old adage "Give a person a fish and they'll eat for a day. Teach a person to fish and they'll eat for a lifetime." The idea is not to give GMs a ton of rules to memorize or reference, but to teach them how to make their own logical judgment calls.)

For the most part, it really is as simple as rating something on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being incredibly easy and 10 being basically impossible. The guidelines in the Task Difficulty table, presented again on page 290 for reference, should help put you in the right frame of mind for assigning difficulty to a task.

For example, we make the distinction between something that most normal people can do and something that trained people can do. In this case, "normal" means someone with absolutely no training, talent, or experience—imagine the most average person in the world trying a task they've never tried before. "Trained" means the person has some level of instruction or experience but is not necessarily a professional.

With that in mind, think about the act of balance. With enough focus, most people can walk across a narrow bridge (like a fallen tree trunk). That suggests it is difficulty 2. However, walking across a narrow plank that's only 3 inches (8 cm) wide? That's probably more like difficulty 3. Now consider walking across a tightrope. That's probably difficulty 5—a normal person can manage that only with a great deal of luck. Someone with some training can give it a go, but it's still hard. Of course, a professional acrobat can do it easily. Consider, however, that the professional acrobat is specialized in the task, making it difficulty 3 for them. They probably are using Effort as well during their performance. And they probably have a Speed Edge of 2 or higher.

Let's try another task. This time, consider how hard it might be to remember the name of a previous mayor of the town where the character lives. The difficulty might be 0 or 1, depending on how long ago they were the leader and how well known they were. Let's say it was ten years ago and they were only mildly memorable, so it's difficulty 1. Most people remember them, and with a little bit of effort, anyone can come up with their name. Now let's consider the name of the mayor's daughter. That's much harder. Assuming the daughter wasn't famous in her own right, it's probably difficulty 4. Even people who know a little about local history (that is to say, people who are trained in the subject) might not be able to remember it. But what about the name of the pet dog owned by the daughter's spouse? That's probably impossible. Who's going to remember the name of an obscure

Greyling, page 220

The Chosen of Flame, page 205

person's pet from years ago? Basically no one. However, it's not forbidden knowledge or a well-guarded secret, so it sounds like difficulty 7. Difficulty 7 is the rating that means "No one can do this, yet some people still do." It's not the stuff of legend, but it's something you would assume people can't do. When you think there's no way you can get tickets for a sold-out concert, but somehow your friend manages to score a couple anyway, that's difficulty 7. (See the next section for more on difficulties 7, 8, 9, and 10.)

If you're talking about a task, ideally the difficulty shouldn't be based on the character performing the task. Things don't get inherently easier or harder depending on who is doing them. The GM should consider only an average human because the Task Difficulty table is based on the ideal of a "normal" person, a "trained" person, and so on. It's humancentric.

Most characters probably are willing to use one or two levels of Effort on a task, and they might have an appropriate skill or asset to ease the difficulty by a step. That means a difficulty 4 task will often be treated as difficulty 2 or even 1, and those are easy rolls to make. Don't hesitate, then, to pull out higher-level difficulties. The PCs can rise to the challenge, especially if they are experienced.

THE IMPOSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES

Difficulties 7, 8, 9, and 10 are all technically impossible. Their target numbers are 21, 24, 27, and 30, and you can't roll those numbers on a d20 no matter how many times you try. Consider, however, all the ways that a character can reduce difficulty. If someone spends a little Effort or has some skill or help, it brings difficulty 7 (target number 21) into the range of possibility—difficulty 6 (target number 18). Now consider that they have specialization, use a lot of Effort, and have help. That might bring the difficulty down to 1 or even 0 (reducing it by two steps from training and specialization, three or four steps from Effort, and one step from the asset of assistance). That practically impossible task just became routine. A fourth-tier character can and will do this—not every time, due to the cost, but perhaps once per game session. You have to be ready for that. A well-prepared, motivated sixth-tier character can do that even with a difficulty 10 task. Again, they won't

TASK DIFFICULTY TABLE

Task Difficulty	Description	Target No.	Guidance
0	Routine	0	Anyone can do this basically every time.
1	Simple	3	Most people can do this most of the time.
2	Standard	6	Typical task requiring focus, but most people can usually do this.
3	Demanding	9	Requires full attention; most people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
4	Difficult	12	Trained people have a 50/50 chance to succeed.
5	Challenging	15	Even trained people often fail.
6	Intimidating	18	Normal people almost never succeed.
7	Formidable	21	Impossible without skills or great effort.
8	Heroic	24	A task worthy of tales told for years afterward.
9	Immortal	27	A task worthy of legends that last lifetimes.
10	Impossible	30	A task that normal humans couldn't consider (but one that doesn't break the laws of physics).

do it often (they'd have to apply six levels of Effort, and even with an Edge of 6 that would cost 7 points from their Pool, and that's assuming they're specialized and have two levels of assets), but it can happen if they're really prepared for the task (being specialized and maxed out in asset opportunities reduces the difficulty by four more steps). That's why sixth-tier characters are at the top of their field, so to speak.

FALSE PRECISION

One way to look at difficulty is that each step of difficulty is worth 3 on the die. That is to say, hinder the task by one step, and the target number rises by 3. Ease the task by one step, and the target number is lowered by 3. Those kinds of changes are big, meaty chunks. Difficulty, as a game mechanic, is not terribly precise. It's measured in large portions. You never have a target number of 13 or 14, for example—it's always 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, and so on. (Technically, this is not true. If a character adds 1 to a d20 roll for some reason, it changes a target number of 15 to 14. But this is not worth much discussion.)

Imprecision is good in this case. For example, it would be false precision to say that one lock on a safe securing an artefact has a target number of 14 and another has a target number of 15. What false precision means in this context is that it would be a delusion to think we can be that exact. Can you really say that one lock is 5% easier to pick than another? And more important, even if you could, is the difference worth noting? It's better to interact with the world in larger, more meaningful chunks than to try to parse things so carefully. If we tried to rate everything on a scale of 1 to 30 (using target numbers and not difficulty), we'd start to get lost in the proverbial weeds coming up with a meaningful distinction between something rated as an 8 and something rated as a 9 on that scale.

Blood money pouch, page 251

CONSISTENCY

Far more important than that level of precision is consistency. If the PCs need to remove the influence of the blood money pouch over an ally, and the GM rules that it is a difficulty 6 task to prepare an ad hoc ritual using rare ingredients and appropriate chanting, then it needs to be a difficulty 6 task if someone else is also affected and they have to try the ritual again (or there needs to be an understandable reason why it's not). The same is true for simpler tasks like walking across a narrow ledge or jumping up onto a platform. Consistency is key. The reason is that players need to be able to make informed decisions. If they remember how hard it was to do that ritual yesterday, but it's inexplicably harder to do it today, they'll get frustrated because they tried to apply their experience to their decision-making process, and it failed them. If there's no way to make an informed decision, then all decisions are arbitrary.

Encourage the players to give feedback. Players should always feel free to tell the GM what they loved and what they didn't love. This is the best way for a GM to grow and get even better, and it ensures that everyone is playing the game they want to be playing.

Think about it in terms of real life. You need to cross the street, but a car is approaching. You've crossed the street thousands of times before, so you can look at the car and pretty easily judge whether you can cross safely or whether you have to wait for it to pass first. If the real world had no consistency, you couldn't make that decision. Every time you stepped into the street, you might get hit by a car. You'd never cross the street.

Players need that kind of consistency, too. So when you assign a difficulty to a task, note that number and try to keep it consistent the next time the PCs try the same task. "Same" is the key word. Deciphering one weird riddle in a book isn't necessarily like deciphering another. Climbing one wall isn't the same as climbing another.

You'll make mistakes while doing this, so just accept that fact now. Excuse any mistakes with quick explanations about "a quirk of fate" or something along the lines of a surprisingly strong wind that wasn't blowing the last time.

MISTAKES

Sometimes the PCs will break down a door, and you'll realize that you rated it too low. Or the PCs will try to paddle a raft down a fast-moving river, and you (and probably they) will quickly discover that the difficulty you gave the task was ridiculously high.

Don't fret.

That door was already weakened by an earthquake, a structural flaw, or the fact that a while back some other people pounded on it all day. That river was actually moving far faster than the PCs thought at first, or their raft was faulty.

The point is, mistakes are easy to cover up. And sometimes, you can even tell your players it was just a mistake. They might even help provide an explanation if you do. It's not the end of the world.

More important, most of the time, no one will even know. For example, did you rate a task to hide from a pursuing cultist of the Lightless Flame as difficulty 4 but it really should have been 3? Oh well. Unless the player rolls a 9, 10, or 11—which would have succeeded for difficulty 3 but not difficulty 4—it won't matter. And even if they do roll one of those numbers, who cares? Maybe the character was feeling the burns from an earlier encounter with the cultist, and it hindered their task.

The thing to take away is this: don't let the fear of making a mistake keep you from freely and quickly assessing the difficulty of a task and moving on with the game. Don't agonize over it. Give it a difficulty, call for a roll, and keep the game moving. Hesitating over a rating will be far more detrimental to the game than giving something the wrong rating.

ROUTINE ACTIONS

Don't hesitate to make actions routine. Don't call for die rolls when they're not really needed. Sometimes GMs fall into the trap illustrated by this dialogue:

GM: What do you do?
Player: I ______________.
GM: Okay, give me a roll.

That's not a good instinct—at least, not for this game. Players should roll when it's interesting or exciting. Otherwise, they should just do what they do. If the PCs tie a rope around something and use it to climb down into a pit to check out a one-eyed skull embedded in the ground, you could ask for tying rolls, climbing rolls, and so on, but why? Just to see if they roll terribly? So the rope can come undone at the wrong time, or a character's hand can slip? Most of the time, that makes players feel inadequate and isn't a lot of fun. A rope coming undone in the middle of an exciting chase scene or a battle can be a great complication (and that's what GM intrusions are for). A rope coming undone in the middle of a simple "getting from point A to point B" scene only slows down gameplay. The real fun—the real story about what's going on with the skull, for instance—is down in the pit. So get the PCs down there.

There are a million exceptions to this guideline, of course. If silver worms are dropping on the PCs while they climb, that might make things more interesting and require a roll. If the pit is filled with chill, brackish water suffused with the influence of The Dark and the PCs must climb halfway down, pull a lever, and come back up, that's a situation where you should set a difficulty and perhaps have a roll. If a PC is near death, carrying a fragile item of great importance, or something similar, climbing down the rope is tense, and a roll might add to the excitement. The important difference is that these kinds of complications have real consequences.

On the flip side, don't be afraid to use GM intrusion on routine actions if it makes things more interesting. Walking up to The Abiding Watcher in hopes of negotiating some sort of uneasy alliance, only to trip on a rug? That could have unforeseen consequences for the character and the story.

GM Intrusions, page 120

The Abiding Watcher, page 196

OTHER WAYS TO JUDGE DIFFICULTY

Rating things on a scale of 1 to 10 is something that most people are very familiar with. You can also look at it as rating an object or creature on a similar scale, if that's easier. In other words, if you don't know how hard it would be to climb a particular cliff face, think of it as a creature the PCs have to fight. What level would the creature be? You could look in chapter 12 and say "I think this wall should be about as difficult to deal with as The Deliverymen. They're level 5, so the task of climbing the wall will be difficulty 5." That's a weird way to do it, perhaps, but it's fairly straightforward. And if you're the kind of GM who thinks in terms of "How tough will this fight be?" then maybe rating tasks as creatures or NPCs to fight isn't so strange after all. It's just another way to relate to them. The important thing is that they're on the same scale. Similarly, if the PCs have to tackle a knowledge task—say, trying to determine if they know where a delivery van is headed based on its tracks—you could rate the task in terms of an object. If you're used to rating doors or other objects that the PCs have broken through recently, the knowledge task is just a different kind of barrier to bust through.

Everything in The Magnus Archives RPG—characters, creatures, objects, tasks, and so on—has a level. It might be called a tier or a difficulty instead of a level, but ultimately it's a numerical rating system used to compare things. Although you have to be careful about drawing too many correlations—a first-tier character isn't easily compared to a difficulty 1 wall or a level 1 animal—the principle is the same. Everything can be rated and roughly compared to everything else in the world. (It works best to take PCs out of this equation.

For example, you shouldn't try to compare a PC's tier to a wall's level. Character tiers are mentioned here only for completeness.)

Last, if your mind leans toward statistics, you can look at difficulty as a percentage chance. Every number on the d20 is a 5% increment. For example, you have a 5% chance of rolling a 1. You have a 10% chance of rolling a 1 or a 2. Thus, if you need to roll a 12 or higher, you have a 45% chance of success. (A d20 has nine numbers that are 12 or higher: 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. And 9 × 5 equals 45.)

The Hunt, page 173

For some people, it's easier to think in terms of a percentage chance. A GM might think "She has about a 30% chance to know that fact about geography." Each number on a d20 is a 5% increment, and it takes six increments to equal 30%, so there are six numbers that mean the PC succeeds: 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20. Thus, since the player has to roll 15 or higher, that means the target number is 15. (And that means the task is level 5, but if you've already determined the target number, you likely don't care about the level.)

GM INTRUSION

GM intrusion is the main mechanic that the GM uses to inject drama and additional excitement into the game. It's also a handy tool for resolving issues that affect the PCs but do not involve them. GM intrusion is a way to facilitate what goes on in the world outside the characters. Can the Avatar of The Hunt track the PCs' movements through the hidden labyrinths beneath the archives? Will the fraying rope hold?

Since the players roll all the dice, GM intrusion is used to determine if and when something happens. For example, if the PCs are fighting cultists of the Divine Host, and you (the GM) know that there are more cultists nearby, you don't need to roll dice to determine if the others hear the scuffle and intervene (unless you want to). You just decide when it would be best for the story—which is probably when it would be worst for the characters. In a way, GM intrusion replaces the GM's die rolling.

The mechanic is also one of the main ways that GMs award experience points to the PCs.

ADVANTAGES OF THIS SYSTEM

1. The GM makes measured adjustments in large, uniform steps. That makes things faster than if players had to do arithmetic using a range of all numbers from 1 to 20.

2. You calculate a target number only once no matter how many times the PCs attempt the action. If you establish that the target number is 12, it's 12 every time a PC tries that action. (On the other hand, if you had to add numbers to your die roll, you'd have to do it for every attempt.) Consider this fact in light of combat. Once a player knows that they need to roll a 12 or higher to hit a foe, combat moves very quickly.

3. If a PC can reduce the difficulty of an action to 0, no roll is needed. This means that an Olympic gymnast doesn't roll to walk across a balance beam, but the average person does. The task is initially rated the same for both, but the difficulty is reduced for the gymnast. There's no chance of failure.

4. This is how everything in the game works, whether it's climbing a wall, sweet-talking a guard, or fighting a supernatural horror like The Flesh Hive.

5. Perhaps most important, the system gives GMs the freedom to focus entirely on the flow of the game. The GM doesn't use dice to determine what happens (unless you want to)—the players do. There aren't a lot of different rules for different actions, so there is little to remember and very little to reference. The difficulty can be used as a narrative tool, with the challenges always meeting the expected logic of the game. All the GM's mental space can be devoted to guiding the story.

This means that you use experience points as a narrative tool. Whenever it seems appropriate, you can introduce complications into the game that affect a specific player, but when you do so, you give that player 2 XP (and they immediately give one of them to another player). The player can refuse the intrusion, but doing so costs them 1 XP. So by refusing an intrusion, the player does not get the XP that the GM is offering, and they lose one that they already have. (This kind of refusal is likely to happen very rarely in your game, if ever. And, obviously, a player can't refuse an intrusion if they have no XP to spend.)

Here's how a GM intrusion might work in play. Say the PCs find a hidden console with some buttons in The Artefact Dealer's office. They learn the right order in which to press the buttons, and a section of the floor quickly opens to an otherwise inaccessible basement. As the GM, you don't ask the players specifically where their characters are standing. Instead, you give a player 2 XP and say, "Unfortunately, you're standing directly over this new hole in the floor." If the player wanted, they could refuse the XP, spend one of their own, and say "I leap aside to safety." Most likely, though, they'll make the defense roll that you call for and let it play out.

There are two ways for the GM to handle this kind of intrusion. You could say, "You're standing in the wrong place, so make a roll." (It's a Speed defense roll, of course.) Alternatively, you could say, "You're standing in the wrong place. The floor beneath your feet drops, and you descend down into the darkness." In the first example, the PC has a chance to save themselves. In the second example, they don't. Both are viable options. The distinction is based on any number of factors, including the situation, the characters involved, and the needs of the story. This might seem arbitrary or even capricious, but you're the master of what the intrusion can and can't do. RPG mechanics need consistency so players can make intelligent decisions based on how they understand the world to work. But they'll never base their decisions on GM intrusions. They don't know when intrusions will happen or what form they will take. GM intrusions are the unpredictable and strange twists of fate that affect a person's life every day.

When player modifications (such as skill, Effort, and so on) determine that success is automatic, the GM can use GM intrusion to negate the automatic success. The player must roll for the action at its original difficulty level or target number 20, whichever is lower.

PLAYER-AWARDED EXPERIENCE POINTS

Players who gain 2 XP as the result of GM intrusion keep 1 XP and give 1 XP to another player for whatever reason they wish—maybe the other player had a good idea, told a funny joke, lent a helping hand, or whatever seems appropriate. The ability for a player to award XP to their friends is empowering and interactive. It helps the players regulate the flow of XP so that no one is left out. It rewards good play that pleases the group as a whole, ensuring that everyone contributes to everyone else's enjoyment. It shouldn't just be the GM who decides which players have done well. Some groups will want to decide the criteria for player-awarded points ahead of time. Some will just want to play it by ear.

Variant: Alternatively, the group could combine the player-awarded points and vote at the end of a session to decide who gets how many XP. This might be the most egalitarian way to do it, but it's probably not as fun or empowering to the individual players.

USING GM INTRUSION AS A NARRATIVE TOOL

A GM can use this narrative tool to steer things. That doesn't mean railroad the players or direct the action of the game with a heavy hand. GM intrusion doesn't enable you to say "You're all captured, so here's your 1 XP." Instead, the GM can direct things more subtly—gently, almost imperceptibly influencing events rather than forcing them. GM intrusion represents things going wrong. The bad guys planning well. Fortune not favoring the characters.

Consider this scenario: the GM plants an interesting clue in a hospital, but the PCs don't stay there long enough to find it. Not long after leaving, they run afoul of a vicious gang of toughs that attack them. The GM uses intrusion to say that the knife wound a PC suffered will get infected and make the character debilitated unless they get a large dose of penicillin, which the group doesn't have. Of course, they aren't required to go back to the hospital where the GM's interesting clue lies, but they probably will.

Some players might find intrusion heavy-handed, but the XP softens the blow. And remember, they can refuse these narrative nudges. Intrusion is not meant to be a railroading tool—just a bit of a rudder. Not an inescapable track, but a nudge here and there.

What's more, the GM doesn't need to have a deliberate goal in mind. The complication you introduce could simply make things more interesting. You might not know where it will take the story, just that it will make the story better.

This is wonderfully empowering for the GM—not in a "Ha, now I'll trounce the PCs" way, but in an "I can control the narrative a little bit, steering it more toward the story I want to create rather than relying on the dice" sort of way. Consider that old classic plot development in which the PCs get captured and must escape from the bad guys. In heroic fiction, this is such a staple that it would almost seem strange if it didn't happen. But in many roleplaying games, it's a nearly impossible turn of events—the PCs usually have too many ways to get out of the bad guy's clutches before they're captured. The dice have to be wildly against them. It virtually never happens. With GM intrusion, it could happen (again, in the context of the larger encounter, not as a single intrusion that results in the entire group of PCs being captured with little explanation or chance to react).

For example, let's say the PCs are surrounded by people in a fishing village mesmerized by the effects of an artefact used by the Avatar of The Corruption. One character is badly injured—debilitated—and the rest are hurt. Some of the people produce a large weighted net from a fishing boat. Rather than asking for a lot of rolls and figuring the mechanics for escape, you use intrusion and say that the net goes over the PCs who are still on their feet. The rest of the mesmerized people point knives menacingly. This is a pretty strong cue to the players that surrender is a good (and possibly the only) option. Some players won't take the hint, however, so another use of intrusion might allow the assailants to hit one of the trapped PCs on the head and render them unconscious while their friends struggle in the net. If the players still don't surrender, it's probably best to play out the rest of the encounter without more GM intrusions—using more would be heavy-handed by anyone's measure—although it's perfectly reasonable to rule that a character rendered debilitated is knocked unconscious, since the fisherfolk are trying to take the PCs alive.

USING GM INTRUSION AS A RESOLUTION MECHANIC

This mechanic offers a way for the GM to determine how things happen in the game without leaving it all to random chance. Bad guys trying to smash down the door to the room where the PCs are holed up? You could roll a bunch of dice, compare the NPCs' stats to the door's stats, and so on, or you could wait until the most interesting time, have the bad guys break in, and award an experience point to the PC who tried their best to bar the door. The latter way is The Magnus Archives way. Intrusion is a task resolution tool for the GM. In other words, you don't base things on stats but on narrative choice. This method frees the GM from worrying about mechanics and looking up stats and allows them to focus on the story.

This isn't cheating—it's the rules of the game. This rule simply replaces traditional dice rolling with good game mastering, logic, and intelligent storytelling. When a PC is climbing a burning rope, and everyone knows that it will break at some point, the game has a mechanism to ensure that it breaks at just the right time.

USING GM INTRUSIONS IN HORROR MODE

With the GM intrusions coming fast and furious toward the end of Horror Mode, it's easy to run out of ideas. In combat, intrusions might just mean that the monster or villain gets a surprise extra attack or inflicts more damage. Perhaps a PC is thrown to the ground or nearer to the edge of a cliff. If the characters are running away, one might trip and fall. If the PCs are exploring, a bookcase topples, potentially hitting someone. Think of all the similar moments you've seen in horror films.

Horror Mode, page 122

Sometimes, if the GM prefers, the GM intrusion can simply be something frightening, like a moan or a whisper. These aren't dangerous to the PCs, but they escalate the tension and indicate that something bad is getting closer.

In fact, while in Horror Mode, GMs should mostly refrain from doing anything bad, ominous, or dangerous unless it's an intrusion (either from a die roll or through the awarding of XP). In a horror game, GM intrusions are an indication that things are bad and getting worse, and whenever possible, the GM should allow the Horror Mode escalation to drive the action.

Frankly, a lot of great GMs over the years—even in the very early days of the hobby—have used their role to manipulate their games on the fly to make a better story. Sometimes they rolled dice or pretended to roll dice, but they were actually using GM intrusions, even if they didn't use that term.

Consider this example. The PCs have tracked something that probably committed a series of horrific murders to an old factory. They enter the building to explore. The GM knows where the creature is hiding in the factory, but decides that it doesn't become aware of the characters until an intrusion is indicated. The only clue the PCs have is a mysterious noise off in the darkness. The creature doesn't move toward them until another GM intrusion occurs. Now they hear something dragging across the factory floor, coming closer. But it's not until a third intrusion occurs that the creature lunges out from behind an old machine at the PC who triggered the intrusion.

In some ways, the status quo doesn't change until an intrusion happens. This could be seen as limiting the GM and the need for pacing, but remember that the GM can still have an intrusion occur anytime they desire, in addition to waiting for the low die rolls.

(GMs may want to limit the number of intrusions to no more than one per round, no matter what the dice indicate, but that should be based on the situation.)

USING (AND NOT ABUSING) GM INTRUSION

Too much of a good thing will make the game seem utterly unpredictable—even capricious. The ideal is to use about four GM intrusions per game session, depending on the length of the session, or about one intrusion per hour of game play. This is in addition to any intrusions that are triggered by players rolling a 1.

INTRUSION THROUGH PLAYER ROLLS

When a player rolls a 1, handle the GM intrusion the same way that you'd handle an intrusion you initiated. The intrusion could mean the PC fumbles or botches whatever they were trying to do, but it could mean something else. Consider these alternatives:

- In combat, the PC's foe is not as hurt as they thought. Give the foe 5 extra points of health.
- In combat, the PC drops their guard, and the foe gets a free attack.
- In combat, reinforcements for the PC's foes show up.
- In combat (or any stressful situation), an ally decides to flee.
- In combat (or any stressful situation), an ally doesn't like the PCs as much as they thought. The ally steals from them or betrays them.
- Out of combat, the PC's pack falls open, or the sole of their shoe tears open.
- Out of combat, it begins to rain heavily.
- Out of combat, a surprise foe appears, and the scene turns into a combat.
- In an interaction, the GM introduces a surprising motive for the NPC. For example, the PCs are trying to bribe an official for information, and the official reveals that what they really want isn't money but for someone to rescue their kidnapped son.

GM INTRUSION THAT AFFECTS THE GROUP

The core of the idea behind GM intrusion is that the player being adversely affected gains an experience point. But what if the intrusion affects the whole group equally? What if the GM uses it to have an unstable device overload and explode, harming all the characters? In this case, if no PC is involved more than the others (for example, no single PC was frantically attempting to repair the device), you should give 1 XP to each character but not give any of them an extra XP to hand out to someone else.

However, this kind of group intrusion should be an exception, not the rule. GM intrusions are much more effective if they are more personal.

EXAMPLE GM INTRUSIONS

It's not a good idea to use the same events as GM intrusions over and over ("Gwen's smartphone lost its connection *again*?"). Here are several different intrusions you can use.

BAD LUCK

Through no fault of the characters, something happens that is bad or at least complicating. For example:

- The floorboard beneath the PC gives way.
- The boat lists to starboard at just the wrong moment.
- A gust of wind blows the papers out of the character's hand.
- The buckle of the PC's pack snaps at an inopportune time.
- The NPC that the characters need to speak with is home sick today.
- A device malfunctions or gives the user a jolt.

AN UNKNOWN COMPLICATION EMERGES

The situation was more complex (and therefore more interesting) than the PCs knew—perhaps even more than the GM knew, at least at the start. For example:

- A poisonous snake darts out from the tall grass and attacks.
- The box that holds the artefact is trapped with a poison needle.
- The NPC that the PCs need to befriend doesn't speak their language.
- The NPC that the PCs try to bribe is allergic to the bottle of alcohol they offer.
- The PCs find the book they need, but the pages are so brittle that if they open it, it might crumble.

AN IMPENDING COMPLICATION EMERGES

GMs can use this type of intrusion as a resolution mechanic to determine NPC success or failure. Rather than rolling dice to see how long it takes an NPC to rewire a security camera, it happens at a time of the GM's choosing—ideally when it would be most interesting. For example:

- The reinforcements finally get through the locked door.
- The ropes of the old rope bridge finally snap.
- The police show up.
- The unstable ceiling collapses.
- The NPC who holds a knife to a character's throat and says "Don't move" cuts the PC when they do, in fact, move, putting them immediately at debilitated on the damage track.

OPPONENT LUCK OR SKILL

The PCs aren't the only ones with surprising tricks up their sleeves. For example:

- The PC's opponent uses a lightning-fast maneuver to dodge all attacks.
- The PC's opponent sees an opening and makes an additional, immediate attack.
- The NPC leader rallies their toughs, who all deal 2 additional points of damage for one round.
- The PC's opponent uses an artefact that produces just the right effect for the situation.
- A bit of the wall collapses in the middle of the fight, preventing the characters from chasing the fleeing NPC.

FUMBLES

Although you might not want every player roll of 1 to be a fumble, sometimes it could be just that. Alternatively, the GM could simply declare that a fumble has occurred. In either case, consider the following examples:

- In combat, the PC drops their weapon.
- In combat, the PC misses and strikes the wall, breaking or damaging their weapon.
- In combat, the NPC hits the PC harder than usual, inflicting 2 additional points of damage.
- In combat, the PC hits an ally by accident and inflicts regular damage.
- Out of combat, the PC drops or mishandles an important object or piece of equipment.
- In an interaction, the PC inadvertently or unknowingly says something offensive.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

GM intrusion doesn't have to mean that a PC has failed. For example:

- The PC disables the explosive device before it goes off, but if someone doesn't remain and hold the detonator, it will still explode.
- The PC creates the antidote, but it gives the imbiber horrible dreams for the next few weeks.
- The PC jumps across the pit but accidentally knocks loose some stones from the edge, making the jump harder for their friend right behind them.

PLAYER INTRUSIONS

Player Intrusion, page 121

Player intrusions give the players a small bit of narrative control over the world. However, the world still remains in the GM's purview. You can always overrule a player intrusion, or suggest a way to massage it so that it fits better into the setting. Still, because it is indeed narrative control, a player intrusion should always involve a small aspect of the world beyond the character. "I punch my foe really hard" is an expression of Effort or perhaps character ability. "My foe slips and falls backward off the ledge" is a player intrusion.

Player intrusions should never be as big as GM intrusions. They should not end an encounter, only (perhaps) provide the PC with the means to more easily end an encounter. They should not have a wide-reaching or even necessarily a long-term effect on the setting. A way to consider this might be that player intrusions can affect a single object (a floorboard snaps), feature (there's a hidden shallow spot in the stream to ford), or NPC (the vendor is an old friend). But not more than that. A player intrusion can't affect a whole town or even a whole pub in that town. A rock can come loose, but a player intrusion can't create a landslide.

THE REST OF THE RULES

The rules exist to be used as tools to shape the game, the story, and the experience. When you tell a player that the howling, bestial nonhuman things at the top of the cliff throw down heavy stones and their character gets hurt, the rules help explain just how hurt.

Advanced Description, page 340

One way to look at it is this: the GM is the sensory input for the players. They can't know anything about what's going on in the fictional reality of the game unless the GM tells them (we'll get to describing things later in this chapter). The rules, then, are one way to convey information to the players in a manner that is meaningful to everyone sitting at the table. The GM could say "You're quite hurt," but the rules clarify how hurt they are. The GM could say "You can hurl that stone pretty far," but the rules provide a definition of "pretty far" that helps keep things consistent, moderately realistic, and understandable so the GM doesn't have to repeat things over and over.

The rules do more than that, of course. They determine success or failure for PCs and NPCs. They help define what resources characters have to interact with the world (although the best resource is the players' ingenuity, and that isn't defined by the rules).

ADJUDICATING

A lot of what we're talking about here is what people sometimes call "adjudicating." Adjudicating is basically the difference between a computer game and a game run by an actual, living human being. All a computer can do (as of yet) is follow the rules. But a human can use their sense of logic (we'll discuss that in detail later) to determine whether the rules make sense for a given situation, and they can do it on a case-by-case basis. Because there's a human GM using logic, the rules for how to play this game take up only a small part of this hefty book. If the rules had to cover every imaginable situation, this would be a very different book.

For example, imagine that the PCs encounter a creature of pure darkness with a life-absorbing touch. It can't exist within the light. One of the PCs has a flashlight and tries to shine the light on themself as a sort of shield to rebuff the creature. Obviously, there's no rules for using a flashlight like that. Should it work? And how well? You could say that the flashlight is too weak to matter. You could also say it's a foolproof way to counter the creature. Using light in that way makes some sense, since the creature's essence is darkness, but the light probably doesn't protect every area on the PC's body at every moment, as their hand is likely to occasionally shake or get jostled. It's complex. Could you devise a rule to cover exactly how well the PC protects themself? Probably, but why bother? You can make a decision based on the situation, and—just as important—the story at that moment. (You can also use GM intrusion and say that the creature slips in at the right moment to attack in an area that wasn't protected. GM intrusion really does solve a lot of these issues.)

Likewise, sometimes a character who falls off a high ledge should be stunned and lose their next turn. That isn't a rule, but it makes sense—sometimes. And the key word is *sometimes*. Because sometimes the situation or the context means you don't want that to happen, so you adjudicate.

A character falling from a 50-foot (16 m) ledge probably takes a serious injury and moves one step down the damage track. That's a lot, but a fresh character can take that and keep going. Sometimes that's okay, but sometimes it stretches our suspension of disbelief. If a player reads the rules on how much damage is dealt by falling, they might even have their character jump off a rooftop deliberately, knowing that they can take it. So you adjudicate that they don't just take the injury, they also lose their next turn, giving the creature chasing them a chance to catch up. That's harsh, and the player will really feel it. But they should, and it will keep them from exploiting what might seem like a hole in the rules in a way that no real person would (and no one in a story would).

Remember, it's your job to use the rules to simulate the world, even if the world is a fictional place with all kinds of strangeness. You're not a slave to the rules—it's the other way around. If you come across a hole in the rules or something that doesn't make sense, don't shrug your shoulders and say "Well, that's what the rules say (or don't say)." Fix it.

When talking about rules, sometimes people will toss around words like "game balance" or refer to rules as "broken." These concepts belong in games where players build characters using extensive rules and make a lot of choices and then pit those characters against specific challenges to see how they

fare. In such a game, a challenge rated or designed poorly, or a character option that grants too much or too little power, can throw everything completely out of whack. Advancing and improving characters is the point of that kind of game, and the way that characters "win" is by overcoming challenges (often, by fighting).

Because this is not a game about matching PC builds against specific challenges, nor a game about advancing characters (at least not solely, and in any event, characters do not advance due to fights or overcoming challenges), these concepts really don't apply. If something seems broken, change it. If a PC ability is too powerful, make it less so. Do it either as part of the story, or—perhaps even better—just be upfront with the players. "Hey, guys, this new psychic power of Ray's is just too good. It's making every fight a pushover and that's not fun. So I'm going to tone down its effect. Sound okay?" An honest discussion with the players is often the best way to handle just about any problem that crops up in a game. And if a player can't handle that kind of interaction, maybe the issue isn't with the game.

LOGIC

Running a game requires a lot of logic rather than a careful reading of the rules. For example, some things give characters a resistance to fire. But there is no special rule for "fire damage" as opposed to "slicing damage" or "lightning damage." Instead, you use logic to determine whether the damage inflicted counts as fire. In these situations, there are only two times when your answer is wrong.

The first is when the answer breaks the players' suspension of disbelief. For example, something that makes a PC fire resistant should probably provide some protection against a heat-based attack from a servant of The Desolation. If it doesn't, your answer will spoil the moment for the group.

The second wrong answer is when you're inconsistent. If you allow a PC's fire protection to give them some protection against The Desolation one time but not the next, that's a problem—not only because it breaks the suspension of disbelief but also because it gives the players nothing to base their decisions on. Without predictable consistency, they can't make intelligent decisions.

These rules are written with the assumption that you don't need to fall back on rules for everything, either for your own sake or as a defense against the players. "I'm going to run a long distance and jump on my big friend's back. On their action, they will run a long distance. So I can move twice as far in one round. There's no rule against that, right?" It's true that there isn't a rule against that, but it makes no sense. The GM's logic rules the day here.

You shouldn't need pedantic rules to defend against the players. You and the players should work together to create a logical, consistent, and believable world and story. Players who try to use the lack of pedantry in the rules to gain unrealistic and illogical advantages for their characters should revisit the basic concept of The Magnus Archives RPG.

Further, the rules don't say things like "The GM decides if the NPC knows the answer to the question, or if they will answer, or how they will answer." Of *course* that's the kind of thing you decide—that's your role. The rules don't state that you decide if something is logical and appropriate to the story or setting any more than they state that the player decides what actions their character will take. That's just the way the game works.

Does this put more pressure on the GM? Yes and no. It means that you need to make more judgment calls—more of the adjudication described above—which can be challenging if you're new at it. But being an arbiter of what seems appropriate and makes sense is something that we all do, all day long. Look at it this way: when you're watching a television show or a movie, at some point you might say "That seems wrong" or "That seems unrealistic." There's no difference between doing that and using logic as a GM.

In the long run, relying on logic frees the GM. No longer saddled with hundreds (or thousands) of individual rules, compatibility issues, loopholes, and the like, you are free to move ahead with the story being told by the group. You can focus more on the narrative elements of the game than on the mechanical ones. To look at it a different way, in other games GMs sometimes spend a lot of time preparing, which is almost always rules-related stuff: creating NPC stat blocks, memorizing rules subsystems that will come into play, carefully balancing encounters, and so on. A GM of this game does very little of that. Prepping for the game means figuring out cool storylines, weird new devices or foes, and the best way to convey the atmosphere. The mechanical elements can be handled during the game, using logic at the table.

DICE ROLLING

Using the rules involves rolling dice. If the dice don't mean anything, then everything is predetermined, and it's no longer a game by any definition—just a story being told. So the dice need to matter. But that means that sometimes a PC will fail when they would succeed if it were a story, and vice versa. That's not a flaw; it's a feature. It's what makes roleplaying games so exciting. When we're watching an action movie, we know that in the third act the hero will defeat the villain at just the right moment. But in an RPG, maybe not. It's not so predictable. That's one of the things that makes them so special.

On the other hand, things like GM intrusions sometimes trump the die rolls to help the story move along in a direction that is (hopefully) best for the game. How do you manage it all?

As you describe the action or as the PCs move about the world, the vast majority of things that happen shouldn't involve dice. Walking around, buying things in a supermarket, chatting with NPCs, crossing the wilderness, looking for a specific grave in the cemetery—these are not actions that normally require die rolls. However, it's easy to think of exceptions where rolls might be needed. How do you decide? There are two rules of thumb.

First, don't ask for a roll unless it seems like there should be a chance of failure and a chance of success. If a PC wants to shoot a pistol and hit the moon, there's no need to roll, because there's no chance for success. Likewise, if they want to shoot that same gun at a large building from 10 feet (3.5 m) away, there's no chance for failure. You and logic run the game, not the dice.

Second, if a creature (PC or NPC) or object is affected in a harmful way—or, in the case of a creature, in a way that it doesn't want to be affected, harmful or not—you need to involve a die roll. Whether the action is slashing with a blade, using deception to trick someone, intrusively reading an NPC's mind, breaking down a door, or applying poison, something is being harmed or affected in a way that it doesn't want to be, so a die roll is needed.

Thus, someone using a power to become invisible likely doesn't require a roll. It just works. There's really no chance of failure (unless the power comes from a faulty spell or some other extraneous force is at work), and it doesn't directly affect anyone or anything other than the character becoming invisible. However, using psychic powers to shape the emotions of another creature would require a die roll.

Of course, sometimes a character can use Effort to reduce the difficulty so there's no need to make a roll. But you, as the GM, can also waive the need for a roll. Consider a character who uses a grenade to deal with a room full of corrupted level 1 rodents. Each has 3 health, and the PC needs to roll only 3 or higher to affect each one, but there are twenty-four rodents. You can simply say, "With a powerful explosion, you incinerate the swarm of rodents, leaving little behind but scorch marks and the smell of burnt hair." This keeps things moving and prevents the game from coming to a dead stop while the player makes two dozen rolls. Frankly, most

The End is Nigh

Stress, page 128

first-tier characters will find level 1 creatures merely a nuisance, so no drama is ruined when the PC takes them all out. Move on to another, greater challenge.

When you waive the need for a die roll, what you're effectively doing is making the action routine, so no roll is needed. In the case of the PC who uses the grenade, you're reducing the difficulty by one step due to circumstances: the rodents just aren't that tough. That's not breaking the rules—that's using the rules.

As an aside, this doesn't mean that the swarm of rodents is a bad encounter. It would be bad in a game where it takes an hour and a half to resolve a fight that was no real challenge. But in The Magnus Archives RPG? Even if the character doesn't blast every rodent, an encounter like that can be resolved in five minutes. Not every encounter needs to be life-or-death to be interesting. But we'll talk about designing encounters (and the related issue of pacing) later in this chapter.

TYING ACTIONS TO STATS

Stats, page 9

Although the decision is open to your discretion, when a PC takes an action, it should be fairly obvious which stat is tied to that action. Physical actions that involve brute force or endurance use Might. Physical actions that involve quickness, coordination, or agility use Speed. Actions that involve intelligence, education, insight, willpower, or charm use Intellect.

In rare instances, you could allow a PC to use a different stat for a task. For example, a character might try to break down a door by examining it closely for flaws and thus use Intellect rather than Might. This kind of change is a good thing because it encourages player creativity. Just don't let it be abused by an exuberant or too-clever player. It's well within your purview to decide that the door has no flaws, or to rule that the character's attempt will take half an hour rather than one round. In other words, using a stat that is not the obvious choice should be the exception, not the rule.

SUFFERING STRESS

Stress is a broadly generalized rule to cover things that wear away at us both mentally and physically. While it's fairly well described in chapter 7, there are a few additional notes to keep in mind:

- Most of the time, if someone suffers Stress from a horrible experience, it should probably be just 1 or maybe 2 points. It should never be more than 3.
- If a typical person wouldn't go to the hospital due to the injury, it's probably not a serious injury, but instead just a few points of Stress. A fight in an alley probably results in Stress, not a major injury. Most accidental injuries will just be Stress.
- Stress is pretty easy to recover from, so use it fairly liberally. (Serious injuries are, well, very serious, and shouldn't ever feel routine. They might even prevent a player from keeping their character in the game, and that robs them of fun and participation, so be careful.)
- If you forget to assign Stress (or a chance of Stress) from a bad experience, don't worry about it. Just keep moving forward—don't retroactively assign the Stress.
- In a stressful situation, sometimes a person grows numb to its effects eventually. Characters don't need to keep suffering Stress over and over for the same thing in a given encounter. If they see a mutilated corpse, that's shocking, but seeing another one right afterward probably isn't worthy of a Stress cost. Likewise, seeing a maniac with a knife attack one's best friend is stressful, but after that first shock, there's probably no additional Stress (unless the friend is stabbed and horrifically wounded or killed).

OPTIONAL RULE: ACTING WHILE UNDER ATTACK

When a character is engaged in melee combat, doing anything other than fighting makes them more vulnerable. This is true for PCs and NPCs. If a character engaged in melee takes an action other than fighting, each of their opponents can make an immediate extra attack. The only exception to this rule is moving. If the character's only action is to move, they are assumed to be moving slowly and carefully out of the fight, safely withdrawing from combat.

For example, Tom has his back against a high-tech security door while fighting two guards. If he tries to open the door using its control terminal, he is taking an action other than fighting, and both guards get to make an attack against him.

GRADUATED SUCCESS

Sometimes, a GM will break away from the traditional model that governs task resolution and allow for a graduated success. With this method, you set a difficulty as usual, but if the player succeeds at a difficulty at least one step higher, their success is better than normal. Likewise, if their roll indicates that they would have succeeded at one step (or more) lower, they might have a partial success.

For example, a PC tracking the people (or things?) who broke into the farmhouse looks for tracks in the woods behind the house. Given the terrain and the weather, the GM decides that the difficulty is 4, so the target number is 12. The player rolls a 10. This isn't enough to accomplish the task the PC set out to do, but since they would have succeeded if the difficulty had been 3, the GM decides that the character still learns that something had moved through the woods recently—they just aren't certain what. The reason is that if the PC had simply been looking for tracks of any kind, the GM would have set a difficulty of 3. Similarly, if the player had rolled a 15—a success at least one step higher—the GM would have said that not only did they find a trail leading away from the house, but there were five of them, and the tracks suggest that they weren't . . . human. In other words, the player would have received more information than they asked for.

In a situation where there are more results than simply success or failure, you can convey these results based on multiple difficulties. A player can state an action, and you can come up with not one difficulty but two, three, or more. For example, if the PCs try to persuade a barista at a coffee shop to give them information, the GM can predetermine that he gives them one minor bit of information if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 2, a fair bit of information if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 3, and everything he knows on the topic if they succeed at a task with a difficulty of 4. The players don't make three different rolls. They make one roll with a scaled, graduated success.

As a rule of thumb, reverse-engineer the situation. If the player rolls considerably higher or lower than the target number (more than 3 away), consider what a success at the difficulty they did overcome would have gained them. If creating a makeshift electronic keycard to open a sealed door has a target number of 18, what does the PC create if the player rolls 16? Perhaps the answer is nothing, but perhaps it is a makeshift keycard that works intermittently.

This system is rarely (if ever) used in combat or situations where something either works or doesn't. But when crafting an object, interacting with an NPC, or gaining information, it can be very useful. Of course, you are never required to use this model of task resolution—sometimes success or failure is all you need to know. Usually, graduated success involves going only one step higher or lower than the original difficulty, but you can be as flexible about that as you wish.

Finally, sometimes you can offer a "consolation prize" for trying. Say a PC fears that a door has been rigged with an alarm. They search it but fail the roll. The GM might still reveal something about the door. "You don't find anything special, but you do note that the door appears quite sturdy and is locked." It's the kind of information the GM might give automatically (think of it as difficulty 0), but it softens the blow of failure. Some information is better than none, and it makes sense that the PC will learn at least something if they study an object for a few minutes.

CYPHERS

You should think of cyphers as character abilities. This means that it is incumbent upon you to make sure that players always have plenty of cyphers to use. There should always be ample opportunity to get new ones. And since the PCs are limited in the number of cyphers they can possess, they will use them liberally.

As a rule of thumb, in any given adventure, a character should use at least as many cyphers as they can carry. This means they should have the opportunity to gain that many in that same amount of time (give or take). They'll need at least one and probably more often two such opportunities.

If your players are typical, they will use combat-related cyphers liberally but hold onto their utility cyphers. A smell of blood will be used, but a gut feeling or a panopticon will linger longer on their character sheets.

As with everything else in the game, it's intentionally very easy for the GM to create new cyphers. Just think of the effect and how to express it as a game advantage. Two kinds of cyphers exist when it comes to effect: those that allow the user to do something better, and those that allow the user to do something they couldn't do otherwise.

The first group includes everything that reduces the difficulty of a task (including defense tasks). The second group includes things that grant new abilities, such as flight, a new means of attack, the ability to see into the past, or any number of other powers.

A few more important notes about devising new cyphers:

- Cyphers should be single-use. The PCs use them up and get new ones.
- Cyphers should be potent. A minor ability isn't worth the trouble. If a cypher isn't as good as something the character can already do, why bother with it?
- Cyphers shouldn't have drawbacks.
- Cyphers should be temporary. Typically, a power is used once. Abilities or advantages that have a duration last from ten minutes to twenty-four hours (at most).

ARTEFACTS

Mechanically, artefacts serve a very different purpose from cyphers. It's assumed that characters are exploring with some cyphers at their disposal. Artefacts, however, are added abilities that make characters broader, deeper, and often more powerful. They aren't assumed—they're extra. And there are often drawbacks and dangers involved.

The powers granted by artefacts are more like the abilities gained from a character's type or focus in that they change the way the PC is played overall. The difference between an artefact and a type or focus ability is that almost all artefacts are temporary.

Like cyphers, then, artefacts are a way for the GM to play a role in the development of the characters. Although artefacts that harm foes (or protect PCs from harm) are fine, special capabilities—such as movement (instantaneous travel, walking through walls) or information (seeing the future, sensing lies)—can change the way the PCs interact with the world and how they deal with challenges. Some of these abilities enable the actions you want the PCs to take. For example, if you're hoping for a showdown with the billionaire head of a huge corporation backing the efforts of The Slaughter, an artefact that the PCs them to mystically bypass the veritable army of guards and security systems gets them to that hopefully fun and dramatic encounter.

Like cyphers, artefacts are simple for the GM to create. Unlike cyphers, artefacts are part of the world and the story. They should be tied to one or more Entities and should be dangerous to use. But ultimately, they still give a character an ability they wouldn't normally have.

HANDLING PLAYERS

Part of being a GM is handling players. This means a lot of things. For example, it's partially your job to make sure that everyone has a good time. You need to ensure that all the players get to do the kinds of things they like to do in games, and that no one is left out. If one player really likes combat and another enjoys NPC interaction, provide some of both. Before you can do that, you need to find out what the players want in the first place, so talk to them and learn their expectations.

Another big part of handling players is coping with disruptive players. Disruptive players can be the death of a game. They can hog all the attention, tell other players what to do, or challenge your rulings at every turn. A lot of GMs are tempted to deal with such players during the game by punishing them or giving them negative feedback. For example, they have the character get attacked more often, lose experience points, or suffer similar consequences. Resist this temptation. Instead, speak with the player person to person (not GM to player) outside of the game and explain that their behavior is causing problems. Be clear, direct, and firm, but also be friendly.

The bottom line, however, is don't play games with jerks. One disruptive, rude, or offensive player can ruin the whole group's fun.

A different problem player is one who just doesn't get the narrative focus of The Magnus Archives RPG. These kinds of players tend to see all games as competitive enterprises, and they might try to "win" by exploiting what they see as holes in the rules to create and play an unbeatable character. Although part of many people's RPG experience is the fun of playing a powerful character, it shouldn't be the ultimate goal in this game because such a player will get frustrated and bored. This game is about investigating horror and coping with its dark implications, not about figuring out how to inflict more damage than the other players.

This player will look for holes in the rules to exploit. And considering the game is designed for a more narrative style, they'll find them. And when they find one, they'll use it to their advantage, making their character super powerful or circumventing a challenge because of the way a rule is worded. And when you try to object, they'll hold up the rules and say "Show me where I'm wrong!"

When a player does that, point them here: "You're wrong."

They're wrong because this isn't a board game where the rules are like a puzzle to be solved or beaten. The rules exist to facilitate the story and portray the world. If there's a "hole" in the rules or a rule that would produce an illogical or unenjoyable result if followed to the letter, change it, redefine it, or just overrule it. It's that easy.

On the other hand, some players absolutely will get it. They'll understand that it's the spirit of the rules, not the letter, that's important. They'll get that the story being told is key. Rather than poring over the description of a power and trying to twist the words to an unintended meaning, they'll use their intelligence and creativity to figure out the best way to use the power to portray a character who fits the setting and is fun to play.

People who try to exploit the rules don't understand The Magnus Archives RPG, but people who exploit the *situations* do. If a player is smart and creative enough to turn the tables on their foes in an unexpected way by using what's around them, allow it (if it makes sense). If the PCs find a pool of caustic fluid and lure their foes into it rather than fighting them in a straightforward manner, that's not cheating—that's awesome.

Be certain you don't accidentally penalize players for not doing the obvious or straightforward thing. Be generous with people who take nonstandard actions or who do something realistic (such as using their action to take stock of the situation rather than attack—ease their next action). Don't make "attack" always the right choice. It's a creative game, so allow the players to be creative.

ENCOURAGING PLAYER CREATIVITY

The Magnus Archives RPG is a game that places more importance on creativity than on understanding the rules. The players should succeed not because they've chosen all the "right" options when creating their characters but because they come up with the best ideas when facing challenges. This means that for every challenge, there should be a straightforward solution (destroy the security cams to sneak into the warehouse) and a not-so-straightforward one (distract the guard watching the monitors while your allies walk past the cameras). It's not your responsibility as the GM to come up with both. The players will come up with the not-so-straightforward solutions. You just have to be willing to go with their ideas.

This doesn't mean you have to let them succeed if they try something weird. On the contrary, the not-so-straightforward solution might end up being as hard or harder than the straightforward one. But you have to be ready to adjudicate the idea no matter what. It's tempting to say that there's no way to get to the guard watching the monitors, so the PCs have to destroy the cameras the old-fashioned way. In some situations, that might be appropriate—perhaps the cameras are monitored from somewhere far away. But a GM has to be willing to say that sometimes it is possible and to adjudicate the details on the fly. If you don't, and you shut down the players' outside-the-box ideas, they will learn that the only thing to do is charge into the fray and bash things every time. That the obvious solution is the only possible solution. Eventually, this will make for boring play because things will seem repetitive and too tightly structured.

The best solution is not to develop preconceived notions of how the PCs might deal with the encounters in an adventure. If they're going to break into a warehouse, you can note that the area has a security guard making patrols and keeping an eye on the camera monitors, where the cameras are located, which doors are locked and set with alarms, and roughly how long it will take for the police to come if called. But you don't know if the PCs will fight the guard, bribe them, or sneak past them. You don't know how they're going to deal with the cameras and the alarms. That's not the kind of thing you need to think about ahead of time, but you have to be ready when it comes up at the table. You should prepare for the most obvious situations—for example, predetermine the level of the guard and the locks on the doors. But when a player states that their action is to look around for spots where the camera cannot see because a wall blocks it or the angle prevents it, that's when you take a second to consider and (particularly if they roll well on an Intellect action) maybe say "Yes, as a matter of fact, there is a spot," even if no such thing had occurred to you before that moment.

SKILLS AND OTHER ABILITIES

Sometimes, the rules speak directly to character creativity. For example, you might allow players to make up their own skills rather than picking from the list. The point is to let players create precisely the characters they want.

Skills, page 15

This concept is supported not only with the open-ended skill system but also with the ability to get an experience point advance to tailor a character further. Likewise, the GM should be open to allowing a player to make small modifications to refine their character. In many cases, particularly ones that don't involve stat Pools, Stress, damage inflicted, or the costs of Effort or special abilities, the answer from the GM should probably be "Sure, why not?" If a PC ends up being really good at a particular skill—better than they "should" be—what's the harm? If Dave can swim incredibly well, how does that hurt the game in terms of the play experience or the story that develops? It doesn't. If Helen can pick practically any mundane lock she finds, why is that a bad thing? In fact, it's probably good for the game—there's likely something interesting on the other sides of those doors.

Character Advancement, page 144

In a way, this is no different than adjudicating a not-so-straightforward solution to a challenge. Sometimes you have to say "No, that's not possible." But sometimes, if it makes sense, open yourself to the possibility.

CHARACTER ARCS

Character Arcs, page 141

Aid a Friend, page 145

Character arcs encourage players to be proactive and create their own goals, with their own definitions of success and failure. Chapter 8 has more details about using character arcs and offers plenty of sample arcs for the PCs.

It's the spirit of character arcs that's important, not the specific rules. Because the arcs consist of broad sets of guidelines for handling a potentially limitless number of stories, you'll want to play fast and loose. Sometimes steps will be skipped. Sometimes they'll be repeated. Sometimes you'll go straight to the climax after the opening (this should be rare, however).

Other times, no character arc in chapter 8 will fit what a player wants to do. In that case, it behooves you to work with the player to make an arc that fits. The player's intention is what's important. Players should think of a goal for their character first and then look through the sample arcs, rather than browse the list and feel that those are the only options. When in doubt, find the arc in chapter 8 that most closely fits what the player wants and then massage it in a few places where needed.

One thing to keep in mind: if the arc doesn't involve at least a few steps and at least some time, it's not really a character arc. If a PC gets picked on in a bar one evening by a jerk NPC and says "My character arc is to punch that guy in the face," that's not a character arc. That's just an action. Character arcs require depth, thought, and, most likely, change on the PC's part.

Think of them in terms of the arcs of characters in your favorite novels or movies. When a PC takes on and eventually completes a character arc, that should feel like a novel or a movie's worth of story (or at least the story of one character in the novel or movie). There should be a real feeling of accomplishment and closure at the end of an arc, but at the same time—assuming the narrative is going to continue—a sense that there's more to come. One arc often leads right into the next.

Character arcs aren't meant to be entirely solo affairs. PCs working as a group should help each other with their respective arcs from time to time. The Aid a Friend arc helps to encourage this. If one or two PCs use this arc to help another character, suddenly it's a group arc, and cohesion and cooperation will come naturally.

It's worth noting, however, that some players will want one of their character arcs to be a solitary venture. They won't want help. They might not even want the other PCs to know about it. That's okay too, but it might require that you spend some time with them playing outside of regular sessions, even if it's just through text or email.

ENSURING PLAYER AGENCY

Players control their characters. This means that they have real choices to make, and no one else, including you, can make those choices for them. This is referred to as player agency, and it's vitally important. It's why forcing players to do something to make the story work (this is called railroading) is bad in games, and why it's terrible to have a player constantly trying to impose their ideas on another.

The best way to ensure player agency is to give them enough information that they can make meaningful choices. If a player knows the possible consequences of two different actions, when they choose to take one of those actions and not the other, they've made a meaningful choice. For example, if they come to a fork in the path in the woods, and they can hear the sounds of snarling from one branch but not the other, they've got the opportunity to make a meaningful choice. Choosing to investigate the scary noise or not, choosing to undertake a mission or not, choosing to keep their word or not—these are important matters and the players should have the control here.

One way that a player can lose agency is when an effect limits their character's actions or eliminates their free will. A character who has fallen down a pit and can't get out loses a great deal of their agency. A character whose mind is controlled by a vampire loses all of their agency. Neither of these situations must be avoided entirely in the game, but you need to pay particular attention when they happen. Some players will really hate it. Some will be fine with it, but even then probably only in small doses.

Similarly, if you put a PC in a situation where their abilities don't work, you're taking away their agency. Making the Occultist use something other than their magic is an interesting challenge once. Negating the character's powers over and over is just not fun. Players often define their characters by the cool things they can do. Their abilities and skills are what make them special. Negating them is another way of saying "Stop having fun."

Rather than negate their abilities or skills, require them. If a character is great at picking locks, don't create the serial killer's lair so that all the doors are impossible to pick. Instead, make it so that picking some locks is literally the only way the PCs can get in. By requiring that ability, you've rewarded the player for selecting it.

CONVEYING INFORMATION

A roleplaying game is a game about talking, and to tell your joint story, you and the players need to be communicating all the time. Think about how you interact with the players. You are their only source of information about the game and the setting, and they are your only source of information about their characters and what actions they take. The entire game is a continuing back-and-forth conversation between you and them.

ASKING QUESTIONS

You set the scene, ask what the players want to do, and then help resolve that. We'll cover setting the scene and resolving tasks shortly, but for now let's focus on asking what the players want to do. Seems simple, right? It is, but there are still a few things to consider.

GMs should be very aware of when they ask leading questions. The point isn't to encourage you to avoid them—just to be aware of them. Sometimes, leading questions are valuable tools. But most players will read into a leading question, so don't use them unless you *want* a player to read into them. Think about questions like this:

- So do you go into the room?
- Who's in back?
- Does anyone keep an eye on the prisoner?
- Which of you looks the most injured?

These questions will make most players leery. On the other hand, questions like the following will make them curious and encourage them to act:

- Do you look in all the drawers?
- Does anyone pay attention to what the other bar patrons are talking about?
- Does anyone activate the device?

But this leading question is probably the most powerful in the arsenal:

- Are you sure you want to do that?

This is useful when a player—perhaps unthinkingly—states an action that is a really bad idea. "Are you sure you want to do that?" is the GM offering the player a do-over. It's the "undo" function at the table. If you say those words, the players will hear "You shouldn't do that." Of course, you can use that to your advantage every once in a while and use this phrase when the players are absolutely certain they're about to do the right thing. It adds a tiny bit of extra last-minute tension drawing directly from a player's own doubt. But don't do it just to be mean. Do it for that moment of tension.

Creating Tension, page 337

Overall, though, leading questions aren't the best way to interact with players. Instead, keep your questions open-ended, such as a simple "What do you want to do now?"

You also shouldn't ask multiple-choice questions. "Which way do you want to go?" is okay, but "Do you go east or west?" is not. RPGs are open-ended, and maybe the players want to do something different. Maybe they want to stop and rest. Or dig down. Or climb up. Or leave and go home. They may have all sorts of interesting options, and it's not your job to catalog all of the possible choices, but if you give them only some of their options, they will feel—even subconsciously—like you're shutting down the options you don't present. That's why "What do you do?" is always the best question. It reinforces the "You can do anything" vibe of an RPG, and it puts all the power over and responsibility for the characters' options in the players' hands, where it should be.

You're going to ask a lot of questions during the game, so cut out any that are extraneous. Don't waste time confirming actions. If someone says, "We go back to town," and none of the other players immediately object, you don't need to confirm with each player individually if going back is what they want to do.

If you know the answer to a question, don't ask it. Just narrate the answer as if you'd asked the question and gotten the answer you were expecting. If you know the PCs want to keep exploring the old junkyard, keep describing it instead of asking the same question over and over. The players will stop you when they have a question or want to take a different action.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Players will ask a lot of questions. Questions about the rules, about the setting, about the situation around them. Each time, give them as clear and concise an answer as you can.

Most of the time, you'll have the answer. Players rarely ask questions so far out of left field that you won't know the answer.

If, however, you don't know the answer, you've got two choices: look it up, or make it up. Sometimes, looking it up isn't an option. This is when you know there's no answer anywhere in a book. So you make it up.

If both are viable options, there are two issues:

1. How important is the answer, and how important might it be later?
2. How long will it take you to find the answer if you look it up?

If the answer to issue 1 is "not very," just make something up and move along. These kinds of questions are along the lines of "What color is the truck?" or "Are the lawyer's office and the bakery on the same street?" It almost certainly doesn't matter. But the player doesn't know that, so they ask. Give them an answer and move on.

If the answer to issue 1 is "might be important" and the answer to issue 2 is "a very short time," look it up in your notes or the rules. That's no crime.

If the answer to issue 1 is "might be important" and the answer to issue 2 is "probably a while," you've got a hard decision to make. You don't want the game to come to a screeching halt for five minutes while you look up a rule or a bit of setting information. But you don't want to make up an answer now that might cause problems in the future. If a player asks "Does it look like it would be difficult to climb to the roof of this building from the outside?" and you know that the PCs will likely be climbing up to the roof a lot, you don't want to make up an answer on the spot and later find it contradicted by the climbing rules or the notes you prepared, because that creates a confusing inconsistency. So maybe you should look it up.

There is a third option, though. Make it up, but write down what you make up. Then, when the same issue comes up later, you'll remember what you came up with on the spot and can ensure that it remains true going forward no matter what anything else says.

If the answer to issue 1 is "definitely important," look it up.

When describing actions or events, you want to be on top of the conversation. It shouldn't be triggered by a player question. In other words, you want a player to say, "We walk down the hallway" with you replying, "When you get halfway down its length, an alarm sounds! Suddenly a snarling dog with glowing red eyes emerges from the now-open door."

What you don't want is for a player to say, "We walk 10 feet down the corridor. Does anything happen?" And then repeat that over and over. Stay ahead of the players. Tell them what they experience before they feel like they have to ask.

You also don't want character actions to become the players asking for permission. You don't want them to ask, "Can I look in the box?" They don't need your permission. You want them to say, "I look in the box." It's not your job to say what they can do; it's your job to tell them what happens when they take action.

Finally, sometimes a player will ask a question that they shouldn't know the answer to. Questions like "Are the police in this town corrupt?" or "Where do criminals fence their stolen goods around here?" Rather than saying, "You don't know," try instead asking the player "How will you find the answer to that question?" Doing that turns their question into a forward-moving action. It becomes something for them to do, and doing things is more interesting than asking the GM questions.

INTERACTING WITH ONE PLAYER VERSUS THE GROUP

When you're running the game, you're running it for everyone. You've got only so much attention to go around, and you can't spend much more of it on one player over the rest. If you do, you'll satisfy one person, but the rest will be frustrated.

However, sometimes one player will attempt to speak for the group, saying something like "We turn on our flashlights and go inside the warehouse." If that happens, just go with it. If the other players don't object, it makes things a little easier and moves them along a little faster. You don't have to get confirmation from all the other players. It's their duty to pay attention and interject with "Wait, I don't want to go into the warehouse" or "I'll stay outside while everyone else goes in" if that's how they feel. In this way, you're like a computer. You can only accept the input you're given.

CHECK IN WITH THE PLAYERS

At various times throughout the campaign, ask the players how they're doing and how they're liking the game. You can do this at the beginning or end of a session, or you can ask the players individually. You could do it via email or text.

LEARN HOW THINGS ARE GOING

You want to be sure they're having fun and there are no concerns that you're not aware of. What you're not interested in, though, is fishing for compliments. The way to get real feedback is to ask "Is there something that would make the game more enjoyable for you?" Some players will reply, "I'd like more magical powers" or something like that. You can probably ignore them (although "I'd like to get more involved in the occult" is useful feedback, if that's what they mean). But if someone says, "I wish there were more mysteries to solve" or "I wish the investigations we undertake weren't always so long," that kind of response is valuable feedback. Use it.

A player might also say that one of the other players makes them feel annoyed, impatient, or generally uncomfortable. Take these comments seriously, but it's not your duty alone to deal with issues like that. You should try to involve at least one other player in this situation, if not the whole group.

REFRESH YOUR MEMORY AND THEIRS

Sometimes, particularly when you plan to tie an aspect of an upcoming adventure to something that happened in the past, you can inquire with the players to learn what they know and don't know about what happened earlier. For example, if one character has been looking for their lost brother and spent a lot of time early in the campaign gathering clues about his disappearance, and now, months later, you plan to introduce a new reference to the missing brother, you might check in with that player (or all the players) and simply say, "Tell me what you've learned about your brother's disappearance."

This accomplishes two things. First, it reminds you of specific details you might not remember. When you know the whole story, sometimes it's easy to forget what the players know and don't know. Second, it encourages the players to reacquaint themselves with information they'll likely need to draw on in an upcoming session, but to do it ahead of time.

CHARACTER SUMMARIES

One way to get feedback of a slightly different kind is to have what you could call a "character summaries" portion after each session. The idea is simple. At the end of a session, go around the table and have everyone describe how the events of the game affected their character. One person might say, "Well, my character is really interested in The Stranger, so the fact that we finally got to encounter one of the NotThem was great." And another might say, "I was really afraid of the creature that attacked us as we got on board the train. I thought we were goners." But a third might say, "I really like combat, so I was a little sad when we decided to run away." Character summaries are particularly useful if you're using the character arcs in chapter 8. In the summary portion, you and the player can quickly determine if any steps in an arc have been accomplished.

Character summaries offer valuable feedback, both positive and negative. The process involves more than just player-to-GM feedback, of course. It encourages players to think about the events of a session and how their characters were affected beyond how much damage they took or how many spells they cast. If you make this a regular routine, you'll probably find that player responses get longer and deeper. Instead of just "I liked this or that" summaries, players will start going in depth and talking about their characters' inner emotional lives.

SECRET INFORMATION

If you need to convey information to one player but not the others, take that player aside. Step with them out into the hallway or the next room. Not only will you be able to interact with them in privacy, you'll create a little metagame tension among the other players as they wonder what the two of you are saying. Don't stay away from the table for too long, though. You'll lose the rest of the players as they get bored waiting and start up a conversation about something unrelated to the game.

Sometimes a player will need to ask you a question in secret. Rather than taking it outside the game room, they can pass you a note or send you a text. If you can reply with a quick yes or no, great. Don't take the time to write a long response, though, because you'll bring the game to a halt as everyone—not just the player who asked the question—waits for you to finish.

HANDLING NPCs

Nonplayer characters are people and creatures that live in the world alongside the PCs. They are just as much a part of the world as the PCs and should be portrayed just as realistically. NPCs are the main way to breathe life into the world, tell the stories the world has to tell, and portray the kind of game you want to run. Memorable NPCs can make or break a campaign.

NPCs are your way of inserting yourself into the game world. You might spend a lot of time adjudicating actions or describing scenes, but when you have an NPC come onstage, you get to say things, take actions, and feel like you're playing the game.

It might seem like a funny point to make, but NPCs don't realize they're NPCs. They don't recognize that the PCs are different from them. They don't treat the PCs any different than anyone else. They don't consider themselves to be minor characters, and certainly not expendable ones. They have goals and desires; they want to be happy and safe and successful. They have a unique personality and perspective. They're not there to be helpful or to be obstacles—they're there to get what they want out of life, just like real people. NPCs shouldn't be cannon fodder because no one thinks of themselves that way. Real people value their lives. They shouldn't be idiots, easily fooled into doing things or acting in ways that no person ever would, simply because a die roll suggests it (unless they're not very bright or something more powerful—like mind control—is at work).

Think about real people that you know or characters from books, television, and movies. Base your NPCs' personalities on them. Make them as widely varying, as interesting, and as deep as those people.

Remember, too, that there are minor characters and major ones, just like in a book. The cultists who waylay the PCs are in the spotlight for only a few minutes at most and don't need a lot of development, but a major adversary or ally might get a lot of attention from the players and therefore deserves a lot from you. As with so many things related to being a good GM, consistency and believability are the keys to developing a good NPC.

There are four kinds of NPCs:

Ongoing. This is an NPC the PCs interact with very regularly. They might accompany the characters on investigations, or maybe they stay back and do helpful internet research, always just a phone call or text away. They have a name, a unique personality, and detailed stats.

Recurring. This is an NPC the PCs interact with regularly. A mentor, a relative, or a similar figure would be a recurring NPC, but so would a foe or villain that the PCs cross multiple times. Like an ongoing NPC, they have a name, a unique personality, and probably detailed stats.

One-Time. This is an NPC the PCs probably meet only once, but the interaction is significant. The NPC has important information to share, has something the PCs need, or wants something from them. One-time NPCs also could be adversaries they face, including nonhuman beings or even beasts that see the PCs as food. They might have a name (but often don't), they might have basic details of their personality defined (but often don't), and they probably have stats.

Extras. These NPCs are background characters. People walking by in the street. The insurance salesman who just wants to get home. The mechanic in the garage. They probably don't have a name, a personality, or even stats. The PCs likely don't talk to them directly, but the GM and players might talk *about* them.

ROLEPLAYING NPCs

The trick with NPCs is that even if they're onstage for only ten minutes, for those ten minutes you should try to roleplay them as if you were a player and that NPC was your character. A smart character should make smart decisions, and a not-so-smart NPC shouldn't. But every NPC wants to succeed and survive. If the PCs have slain seven of the eight corrupted wolves they encounter, is that last wolf really going to stand and fight, or will it run off? It's up to you to decide, but try to make the decision on the wolf's behalf, not on the players' behalf. Doing so will bring a lot of believability to the story.

NPCs that the PCs spend more time with should be even more fleshed out. Having an NPC on an adventure with the PCs allows the players to interact with them—and with each other—in character. If the group is traveling from one location to another, you can have the NPC strike up a conversation with the PCs about their past deeds, their current goals, their families, or anything else. It's a great way to have calm or poignant moments that aren't about adventure or action, but character.

A powerful tool in your GM's toolbox is making an NPC ally really likeable. In a way,

players grow accustomed to NPCs being foes and sources of danger or betrayal. Letting them get to know a truly kind, sincere, and friendly NPC becomes great story material, because the players will want to help that character if they're in need. The things that character does and says will have more meaning. And if something bad befalls them, it will be a moment of real drama.

Of course, if we're just talking about an NPC extra, you don't want to give them this much thought. Or any thought at all, really. If the PCs need to buy a backpack to carry extra stuff on their investigation, and you say, "Okay, you find a store where you can buy one," there are certainly NPCs involved, even if they're not explicitly mentioned. You might even say, "The salesperson in the store is surprised when you come in covered in blood and grime." But most of the time, no one interacts with the NPC as part of the story, so don't give that NPC a moment's thought. Sometimes, the PCs might try to start up a conversation with them (or with a random person on the street or someone else unexpected), so you have to be prepared to suddenly take on the role of the NPC. They don't need a lot of detail, but it can be fun if the random person the PCs ask for directions has an interesting personality.

Last, while NPCs are the way you get to have a voice in the story, don't let an NPC become your mouthpiece. Don't use an NPC to say something you want to say or give clues or insight they could never have just because *you* have them.

THE MIND OF THE VILLAIN

Magnus Archives stories involve lots of bad guys. It's tempting to make most of them faceless goons who are there to be obstacles for the PCs. And sometimes that's okay. A crowd of enraged townspeople chasing the PCs who are mistakenly blamed for some wrongdoing don't need a lot of individualism—in fact, giving them individualism might be the opposite of what the story needs.

However, you might want to give some NPCs more thought. You don't have to give every member of the People's Church of the Divine Host their own personality and motivation, but you might at least think about them as people and not robots. They may have a strong desire to follow orders given to them by the higher-ups, but they probably aren't suicidal. Play them that way. In fact, showcase that kind of dichotomy sometimes. Are people who worship horrific inhuman forces so loyal that they will give their lives for those forces? Maybe for some fanatics, the answer is yes, but for others, likely not.

The point is, they don't see themselves as cannon fodder.

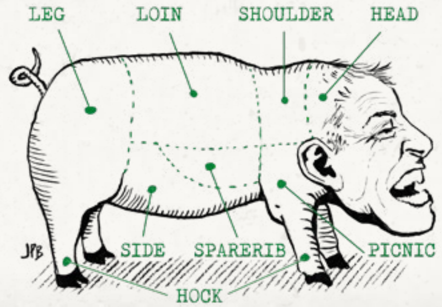
Villains—bad guys that you've given a name and a personality—should be roleplayed like fully fleshed-out PCs. They should use every resource and opportunity they have to get what they want, and if they're smart, they should do so wisely. They should have clever contingency plans and a means of escape in case things go wrong. If someone has spent their life collecting cursed magical artefacts, for example, they likely have survived a few bad situations already and won't easily be caught off guard.

And it's worth noting that the vast majority of villains don't see themselves as such. They are the heroes of their own stories. They have a reason for doing what they're doing (even if it's selfish or sadistic) that they see as worthwhile. Perhaps the people who have to die at the hands of The Desolation are expendable because those who survive (and the human race in general) will be stronger. Or, alternatively, maybe humanity doesn't deserve to survive.

The goal they have in mind is worth whatever terrible thing they're doing. They might regret the horrible acts they commit but do them anyway to get what they want. Or maybe they're sadistic and love it. Or nihilistic and just want to see the world burn.

A truly horrible villain is the kind of antagonist that players love to hate, and adding that element to your story ramps up the potential emotion. In the same way that a truly likeable NPC can be a potent tool in your toolbox, so can a recurring despicable villain. The villain who crosses swords (maybe literally) with the PCs but always manages to get away, even when the PCs stop their scheme, encourages the players to emotionally driven actions. When they say through gritted teeth, "We're going to get that guy," you know you've done something right.

> [. . .]Wolfgang had other projects to which he wished to devote his attentions, most notably a grotesque "speaking machine" that he insisted would someday be capable of mastering human speech. I saw many of his designs: the bellows that aped the work of lungs, the wooden box of valves and pipes, and that most grotesque "mouth" he had constructed of some awful undulating substance he claimed was derived from an Indian tree. To dissuade him from his conviction that it would someday be capable of rendering intelligible speech was impossible, but hearing the mournful wail that came from the spasmodic thing he called a mouth, I fervently prayed I would never have to be there when it did so. A prayer that went unanswered.
>
> —MAG 116: "The Show Must Go On"



CREATING NPCs

NPCs should have goals, personalities, quirks, flaws, and backstories. They've probably got a place they call home and people in the world that they care about. You want the NPCs to be meaningful additions to the story that the group creates. The important ones should be memorable so the players remember the shopkeeper with the funny accent or the mechanic who always seems to be eating.

One way you can do that is to give each NPC one or two traits that will make them memorable. These shorthand descriptions are meant for one-time NPCs or extras, so keep them simple. They're just a hook to hang your hat on, so to speak, when that NPCs is on stage. As tools to help create an ongoing or recurring character, you'd probably want to develop them further.

Sample NPC traits:

- Thinks they're funny
- Legitimately funny
- Always smoking
- Always eating
- A little too fascinated by fire
- More interested in animals than in people
- Always scratching
- Always reading
- Dissatisfied with current situation
- Indefatigable
- Always looking for an easier way
- Conducting illegal activities on the side
- Conspicuously hiding a secret
- Overly generous
- Likes to give people nicknames
- Surprisingly fixated on their hat
- Prejudiced against a group
- Brandishes an overdeveloped vocabulary
- Always forgetting the words for things
- Frequently using malapropisms
- Often hums without realizing it

NPC GAME STATS

While chapter 12 offers a lot of NPCs from the podcast, you'll find that you still have to create new NPCs all the time. Most are the "normal" people the PCs interact with in the course of the story. Usually, they can simply be pegged at a level from 1 to 10 and you're done. Working on how to describe or portray them will take longer than working up their game stats.

Sometimes, though, you'll want to elaborate on the NPC's capabilities and tailor them to the concept. A level 4 NPC who is a computer genius might be level 5 or 6 in computer-related tasks. But don't simply make the NPC level 5 or 6 overall because then they'd also be better at combat, interactions, climbing, jumping, and everything else, and that doesn't fit your concept.

Use the NPCs in chapter 12 as good starting points or as examples for what you can do. But you're not limited by them. In fact, you're not limited in any way. The most important thing to remember about NPCs is that they do not follow the same rules as PCs. They don't have descriptors, types, or foci. They don't have tiers or any of the same stats. They don't even roll dice.

NPCs work precisely as you (and the setting and story) need them to. If an NPC is a great martial artist, you can give them obvious advantages with attacks and defense, but you can go outside the box as well, allowing them to attack more than once per turn, attempt to disarm foes with a flick of the wrist, and so on.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for creating an NPC who can be matched perfectly against the PCs in combat—it's not that kind of game, and that's not the purpose of NPCs. Instead, use the game's simple mechanics to portray the NPCs in the world and in your narrative so that they make sense and can do what you want them to do (and cannot do what you don't want them to do).

Some NPCs possess mystical powers derived from the Entities. In theory, NPCs can heal themselves, create force fields, travel instantaneously, turn back time, hurt a foe with a sonic blast, or do anything else. You can lay out these abilities when preparing for the game, or you can just go with the idea that certain NPCs can produce amazing and surprising effects and make them up as you go along—with some caveats.

If all NPCs can do whatever they want, whenever they want, that won't instill much belief in the players or give you much credibility as a GM. So keep the following things in mind.

Keep to the Level: NPCs should generally keep to their level parameters. Sure, you can give a tough NPC more health than their level might indicate, and the aforementioned great martial artist might attack and defend at higher than their normal level, but these are minor exceptions.

Explain Things However You Want: If you keep to the level parameters, you can express them in all sorts of interesting ways. For example, a level 5 NPC usually inflicts 5 points of damage. But that damage might come from a handgun they had concealed or a well-aimed kick to the midsection.

Use Wild Cards: You might give some NPCs—sorcerers, Avatars, creatures spawned from the Fears—a wild card ability that allows them to do interesting things like levitate, use telekinesis, disappear into the shadows, and so forth. You don't have to nail down these powers ahead of time. These rare NPCs can just do weird things. As long as you keep them reasonable most of the time, no one will bat an eye. (If every important foe has the equivalent of a force field, that will seem repetitious, dull, and unfair to the PCs.)

Use GM Intrusions: Since a PC can produce all kinds of interesting, useful, and surprising effects thanks to cyphers, you can occasionally replicate this for an NPC by using GM intrusions to give them precisely the ability needed in the current situation. If the NPC has been poisoned, they pull out a dose of antivenom. If a villain is cornered by the PCs, they call upon their dark gifts to

GM Intrusions, page 120

phase down through the floor. If the foe is at the extreme edge of low health, they inject themselves with adrenaline that restores 15 points of health immediately.

NPCs AND DEATH

As explained in chapter 7, NPCs have a health score rather than dealing with Stress or injury like PCs. When an NPC reaches 0 health, they are down. Whether that means dead, unconscious, or incapacitated depends on the circumstances as dictated by you and the players. Much of this can be based on logic. If the NPC is cut in half in a car accident, they're probably dead. If they're mentally assaulted with a telepathic attack, they might be catatonic instead. If they're hit over the head with a club, well, that's your call.

NPC health, page 124

It depends on the intentions of those who are fighting the NPC, too. PCs who want to knock out a foe rather than kill them can simply state that as their intention and describe their actions differently—using the flat of the blade, so to speak.

NPC ALLIES

Because the players usually roll all the dice, NPCs who are not opponents raise unique issues. If a character gains an NPC ally who accompanies the group, how are the ally's actions resolved?

Most of the time, the GM should decide what makes the most sense in the context of the situation and the NPC. If the characters climb up a steep slope and must make rolls to ascend, the NPC doesn't make a roll. Instead, the GM quickly considers whether they could climb it and goes from there. A fit, able ally should simply climb the slope. A feeble or clumsy NPC will need assistance. In other words, the NPC doesn't face the challenge (that's what the PCs do)—they remain a part of the unfolding story. The old man the PCs must escort through dangerous mountains needs help climbing because that's part of the story of the adventure. His able-bodied daughter who also travels with the group does not need help because that wouldn't make much sense.

If the entire group is caught in a landslide later in that same adventure, the GM can do one of two things in regard to the NPCs. Either decide what happens to them as seems most logical or fitting (perhaps using GM intrusion, since what befalls the NPCs also affects the PCs), or have the players roll on behalf of the NPCs and treat them just like the player characters in every way possible.

CREATURES, MONSTERS, AND INHUMAN NPCs

Not every NPC in a Magnus Archives campaign is human. Vampires, perfect strangers, and creepy clown dolls don't have entirely understandable human motivations. We can sketch out vague desires or prescribed actions (for example, vampires want to feed), but we probably can't *understand* them. That's part of cosmic horror, which we'll discuss later in the chapter.

Vampire, page 242

Perfect stranger, page 231

Clown doll, page 206

Cosmic Horror, page 343

But usually that kind of basic drive is sufficient to run the NPC well enough. You don't need to know The Anglerfish's internal monologue to place it in the scene. Frankly, it doesn't even call itself "The Anglerfish," so we don't know anything about it other than what it does. That lack of humanity, however, makes it more terrifying. Humanizing such a thing makes it less horrific and less alien.

The Anglerfish, page 197

Whenever possible, creatures should be handled like other NPCs. They don't follow the same rules as the player characters. If anything, they should have greater latitude in doing things that don't fit the normal mold. A many-armed beast should be able to attack multiple foes. A charging rhino ought to be able to move a considerable distance and attack as part of a single action.

CREATING NEW CREATURES

It's fun to pull creatures right out of the podcast to use in your game. It's wonderful to give life to The Anglerfish, NotThem, or The Man Who Wasn't There. However, your game will benefit if you also create original monsters of your own.

The Magnus Archives RPG has no system for building creatures. There is no rule that says a creature with a certain ability should be a given level, and there is no rule dictating how many abilities a creature of a given level should have. But keep the spirit of the system in mind. Lower-level creatures are less dangerous. A level 1 creature could be poisonous, but its venom should inflict a few points of Stress at most. The venom of a level 6 creature, however, might knock a PC down a step on the damage track or put them into a coma if they fail a Might defense roll. A low-level creature might be able to fly, phase through objects, or instantaneously travel because these abilities make it more interesting but not necessarily more dangerous. The value of such abilities depends on the creature that uses them. In other words, a phasing rodent is not overly dangerous, but a phasing Monster Pig is terrifying. Basic elements such as health, damage, and offensive or defensive powers (such as poison, paralysis, disintegration, immunity to attacks, and so on) need to be tied directly to level—higher-level creatures get better abilities and more of them.

Consider creature size very carefully. For those that are quick and hard to hit, hinder attacks against them. Large, strong creatures should be easier to hit, so ease attacks against them. However, you should freely give the stagger ability to anything twice as large as a human. This means that if the creature strikes a foe, the target must make an immediate Might defense roll or lose its next turn.

A creature's level is a general indicator of its toughness, combining aspects of power, defense, intelligence, speed, and more into one rating. In theory, a small creature with amazing powers or extremely deadly venom could be high level, and a huge beast that isn't very bright and isn't much of a fighter could be low level. But these examples go against type. Generally, smaller creatures have less health and are less terrifying in combat than larger ones. (But they often come in swarms.)

INTERACTIONS

Let's say the PCs want to learn more about a missing man, so they talk to his best friend. You and the players roleplay the conversation. The players are friendly and helpful and ask their questions with respect. Do you call for an Intellect roll (using the friend's level to determine the difficulty) to see if he will talk to them, or do you simply decide that he reacts to them well and gives them the information?

As another example, an old woman has watched over a mysterious old house for years. She considers it a duty given to her by God and has never told anyone the secrets she knows. The PCs come along with training in interactions, roll dice, and expect the woman to spill her guts. Does she tell them everything?

The answer to both questions is: it depends. In either situation, you're justified in ignoring the dice and mechanics and simply handling things through table conversation. That's what makes interaction encounters so interesting and so distinctive from, say, combat. You can't put aside the dice and act out the fight between the PCs and a lightless beast, but you can roleplay a conversation. In such cases, you can portray the NPCs precisely as you want, in ways that seem fitting to their personalities, without worrying about die rolls. The best friend probably wants to help the PCs find his missing comrade. The old woman would never give her secrets to a band of smooth talkers that shows up on her doorstep one day. You can also ensure that the players get the information you want them to get—and don't get the information you don't want them to get.

Lightless beast, page 224

On the other hand, sometimes using game mechanics is a better option. For example, a person who isn't particularly eloquent might want to play a character who's a smooth talker. You wouldn't require a player who's never fired a gun in real life to prove that they're a crack shot to hit a target in the game, so you should not force the player of a charming character to be, well, charming. The game mechanics can simulate those qualities.

And sometimes, you can use both approaches. You can let the conversation with the NPC play out around the table, and then call for rolls—not to determine whether the PCs succeed or fail at the interaction, but to get an idea of the degree of success. For example, if the characters have a good cover story for why the security guards checking visitors as they come into the building should let them pass, the roll might determine not whether the guards say yes (you can use logic for that) but whether the guards accompany the PCs into the facility. In a way, the die roll shapes an NPC's reaction. It's not an on/off switch but a general degree of the overall trust that the PCs earn.

LANGUAGES

Careful readers will have noticed that there are no intricate rules for languages in the game. That's because for most people, language is more of a background or roleplaying feature than a mechanical one. You don't want to have to make a roll to speak, for example. Characters should begin the game knowing the language(s) that make the most sense for them.

Languages are a special case, however, because some people won't want to deal with it. And that's fine. Some players and GMs will find it an interesting challenge to communicate with people or creatures who don't share a common language. Others will think it's an impediment to interaction with no real upside. You can handle the issue however you want.

RUNNING COMBAT AND ACTION SCENES

In The Magnus Archives RPG, combat and other types of action should not be used for their own sake. They should be about something, with something interesting at stake. "Trying not to die" is an interesting stake, but it's not the only one.

In some ways, once a story devolves into combat, it's safe to say that something has gone terribly wrong. In the podcast, as well as in most horror stories, the characters are far more likely to run from a terrifying threat as they are to try to fight back. That's appropriate to the genre and, considering the damage mechanics of this game, it's smart.

Combat in the game is very deadly. A couple of serious wounds puts a character at risk of death, which can mean just two failed defense rolls. Hiding from monsters, running from threats, sneaking past foes rather than attacking, and even surrendering are viable strategies to avoid having to make those rolls.

Combat in an RPG can be fun and exciting, but here it's not the focus. Fighting through a long combat isn't the point, and finding a way to win (or survive) a combat quickly through creative thought isn't cheating. Avoiding fights is more advisable than "winning." In fact, it should be encouraged. Defeating the "big boss monster" easily should not be a letdown; it should be the result of smart, creative play. And horror stories shouldn't always have a climax involving a "big boss monster," anyway. Jonathan doesn't defeat Not-Sasha in combat in episode 79, even though he's found himself a weapon of sorts. Instead, Jurgen Leitner uses *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* to trap it in the tunnels beneath the archives.

Likewise, many of the foes the PCs face should not have physical confrontation as their goal. Think about characters like Oliver Banks or Michael Shelley. These interesting people are tied directly to the Entities (The End and The Spiral, respectively), but neither are about fighting. Stories with them or NPCs like them can be creepy or disturbing without involving any kind of combat.

There are other exciting ways to end a story rather than a big fight. It could involve surviving a massive landslide, escaping in a harrowing chase, finding a way to shut down a dangerous machine, or convincing an Avatar to let their hostages go.

Sometimes, combat is the obstacle that the PCs must overcome to reach their goal, which again reinforces the idea that there is no right or wrong way to succeed. Sneak past foes or convince them to let the PCs through—both are entirely valid.

Mechanically, combat in The Magnus Archives RPG doesn't play out as it does in many games where damage whittles down a character's hit points or health score. That kind of slow attrition won't happen because every serious wound is a real danger. PCs will thus focus a lot on easing their defense rolls or use experience points for rerolls to avoid getting struck. So combats might involve a lot of narrow misses and harrowing moments rather than a slow depletion of health.

DESCRIBING THE ACTION

Great roleplaying game sessions often involve immersion. Immersion comes from a sense of being truly caught up in the action and the fictional world. Just as when you read a great book or watch a well-made movie, playing an RPG can get you caught up in your own imagination. And best of all, you're sharing your imaginative escape with everyone else at the table. For immersion to work, you have to give great descriptions.

The rules for combat and action in this game, for example, are simple and open-ended rather than precise, giving you lots of room to describe how characters move, how they attack, and how they avoid attacks. A successful Speed defense roll might mean dodging, blocking with a weapon, or ducking behind a pillar. A character who is struck in combat for 3 points of Stress might have dodged the weapon attack but fallen backward over the couch, landing hard on their head on the floor.

GMs should consider making it clear when a threat probably will result in Stress from physical harm and when it may result in a serious injury. It helps players weigh their options. The right answer might be to tell the PCs that anything that looks dangerous and scary may cause a serious injury, because it's very often the truth.

It is entirely appropriate to remind the players—more than once, perhaps—that this is a deadly game and that it can be very unforgiving if the PCs aren't careful.

Plenty of creatures and NPCs the PCs will encounter do have violence and inflicting physical harm as their goal.

The Seven Lamps of Architecture, *page 281*

The End, page 172

The Spiral, page 175

The players should describe their actions, too. Encourage them to be creative in what they do and how they perform a task, whether it involves the way they attack, what they do to give themselves the best chance to make a difficult leap over a pit, or how they slip into the millionaire's study to steal the documents they need.

Don't take any of this as a requirement. Long descriptions can be tedious as easily as they can be interesting. Sometimes the best way to serve the pacing of a combat encounter is to state whether an attack hit and how much damage is dealt and keep things moving. Vivid description is great, but it's not a valid excuse for you or a player to drag things out and destroy the pacing.

PACING

The key to running a great game as opposed to an adequate one is often the simple matter of pacing. Well, pacing is simple to describe, but it's not so simple to understand or implement. It comes with practice and a sort of developed intuition.

Pacing can mean many things. Let's briefly break them down.

PACING WITHIN AN ENCOUNTER

Keep things moving. Don't let the action get bogged down by indecisive players, arguments about the rules, or irrelevant minutiae. Don't let the middle of an encounter get sidetracked by something that reminds a player (or worse, you) of a gaming story, a movie, or a funny thing on the internet. There's time for all of that later, probably after the game session is over.

Don't let the end of the encounter drag out. When it's clear how things are going to turn out, and people might start to get bored, wrap it up. If the PCs were attacked in a basement by two dozen vicious rats but defended themselves admirably and only three rats are left, there's nothing wrong with saying that those last three run away or that the PCs handily dispatch them. Wrap things up and move along.

PACING WITHIN A GAME SESSION

Have many different encounters in a session—some long, some short, some complex, some straightforward. One of the trickiest aspects of game session pacing is deciding what to play out and what to skip. For example, the PCs want to buy new gear before going on their next investigation. You could describe the various stores nearby and roleplay each interaction with the clerks. You could even call for occasional rolls to see if the characters get good deals or not. Alternatively, you could say "Okay, you can buy whatever you want" and move on. There are good cases to be made for both approaches, depending on the context. Maybe one of the PCs became cursed on the last investigation and doesn't realize it until they are interacting with people in the market. Maybe a pickpocket in the mall attempts to steal from the PCs, or they notice a thief stealing from a store. Maybe the players like interacting with NPCs and enjoy your portrayal of minor characters. All of these are good reasons to play out a shopping encounter. But if there's no compelling reason, just advance through it.

Sometimes, you should do this even if one player wants to play out every moment of their character's life and describe everything in excruciating detail. Although you want everyone to be happy, you're in charge of pacing. If you must err, make the players struggle to keep up, rather than letting them be bored and wonder when you're going to get on with it. Thus, if there's no compelling reason against it, don't hesitate to advance time, even in large chunks. If the PCs finish a big scenario and some downtime makes sense, there's nothing wrong with announcing, "So three weeks later, you hear that . . ." and starting the next storyline (as long as the players are content with it). Books and movies do this kind of thing all the time. Skip the boring bits.

In addition, feel free to intrude on player discussions for the purpose of moving things along. Sometimes players spin their wheels or plan and plan their next move, never accomplishing anything. You can intrude by throwing an encounter or a surprise their way ("You get a phone call from the head archivist"), or you can simply say "Let's move things along."

Keep a clock handy so you can see how much time is left in the session. Never lose track of time. You want to end a session at a good point—a place where everyone can catch their breath, at a good cliffhanger, or as everything in a story wraps up so you can start anew next time. These are all fine stopping points, but you want to control which one you use. Next session, you'll have to start things up again, recap past events, and get everyone back into the swing of things.

Try to ensure that at the end of any session, the players can look back on what they did and feel like they accomplished something.

PACING WITHIN A STORY

This aspect of pacing is similar to how fiction writers handle story creation, and it's a huge subject, but consider the standard three-act structure as a good starting point. In act one, the problem is introduced. In act two, things get worse (or a new complication is introduced). In act three, things are resolved. There are many other ways to do it, but remember that the action needs to ebb and flow. You need downtime between the moments of action, horror, or high drama.

Crafting Stories, page 327

PACING WITHIN A CAMPAIGN

Mix short scenarios in with longer ones. Weave plotlines together so that as one story ends, the PCs still have things to do. But don't be afraid of downtime. Let the characters have a week, a month, or longer here or there to live their normal lives before throwing them once again into the heart of danger. If a campaign takes a year of play time in the real world, you don't want it to take place in only three weeks of game time. That never feels right.

Perhaps the best way to get new listeners to understand the premise and tone of The Magnus Archives *is to have them listen to the first episode, "Anglerfish."*

RESTING

Don't forget to give the PCs opportunities to rest. Obviously, you can't force them to rest, but there should be obvious moments where they can take the time to rest for a few minutes, a few hours, or even a full day or more. These should come at least twice in an investigation, and between investigations—unless something special is going on that requires immediate attention—the PCs should have days or even weeks to live their lives, do paperwork, attend to family matters, go to class, go to work, and so on.

Resting allows PCs to shake off some Stress, restore their Pools, and maybe get new cyphers. All of these things are vital to character success and player fun. It's also a nod to verisimilitude. Real people need to rest, and they need to do things other than investigate the paranormal.

Things that keep PCs from resting:

- The person/thing they are after is always on the move.
- New events constantly demand their immediate attention.
- Challenges are time-sensitive.

In a horror game, you've got to have downtime when things aren't terrifying or even creepy so the players have a chance to breathe. Operating at a heightened level over a long period of time makes even the most horrific or exciting scenes feel lackluster. If everything is scary, nothing is scary.

Consent Checklist, page 381

The Vast, page 176

TEACHING THE RULES

It's not your job to teach the players the rules, yet it often falls upon the GM to do just that. Before beginning a game, encourage the players to read chapter 1 to get an overview of the game. It won't take them long.

You'll also want to give them an overview of The Magnus Archives setting and establish their expectations for tone and mood. The easiest way to do that is probably to have them listen to an episode or two of the podcast.

Focus primarily on the kinds of characters a player can create and what they might do in the game. Once players understand who they are and what they'll do, the rest of the setting is just details they can discover as they go along.

The key to teaching someone the game is to start with the idea of die rolls and how they use the same mechanic no matter what a character tries to do. Then explain using Effort, which involves an introduction to the three stats. After that, a player is ready to start making a character. Taking a new player through the character-creation process gets them ready to play. Don't overload them with a lot of details beyond that. All of those can be picked up as needed in the course of play.

THE CONSENT CHECKLIST

Make sure you're familiar with the section in chapter 1 about the consent and safety tools at your disposal—in particular, the consent checklist.

Your response to the checklist might be "I don't need to do this, I know my friends." And in many cases that might be true. But horror can bring out aspects of us that we don't always express. A GM might have been friends with someone for a long time, and even played many roleplaying games with them, but never knew that they are horrifyingly, debilitatingly terrified of deep water. If, when confronting the Avatar of The Vast, their character is thrust deep, deep under the surface of the ocean, they might just say, "Nope, I'm out," and leave the table. Or, worse, they might sit and suffer in silence, have a terrible time, and not want to play a game with you ever again.

Now, if you're thinking, "I *want* the players to be terrified, so I shouldn't avoid the things that bother them. In fact, I should lean into them!" remember that there's a fun sense of fear and creepiness, and then there's trauma. The first is desirable; the second, obviously, is not. Better safe than sorry, really.

And don't forget the most important aspect of the consent checklist: using it as a tool when playing with new people. You may know your friends, but you don't want to accidentally traumatize a new player right out of the gate.

THE FIRST FEW SESSIONS

With any game, GMs should consider running it a little differently the first few times, and The Magnus Archives RPG is no different. There are a few things you can expect with a table full of new players. First of all, they won't get the terminology and the jargon right—they'll use the terminology and jargon of the last game they played. And that's fine. But you should try to get it right because the players will follow your lead, and after a session or two, they'll start getting it right. If you always call things by the wrong name, the players will, too. However, don't just spout jargon. Each time you use a new term for the first time, such as "damage track," "GM intrusion," or even "difficulty," explain what it means. Make sure everyone's on the same page, even with the basic stuff.

The players won't know what's easy and what's hard. Part of good play is knowing when to use Effort and when to conserve, but beginning players will have no frame of reference. In this case, the best way to give them solid ground to stand on is to be fairly transparent. Tell them the target number for each task before they attempt an action. Guide them through the process. Remind them that they can use Effort if need be, although they probably won't forget. On the contrary, beginning players tend to use Effort on every roll. You can almost count on it. This means you can expect beginning characters to do very well in whatever they set out to do, but they'll have to rest more often because they'll deplete their stat Pools more quickly.

CRAFTING STORIES

The Magnus Archives RPG is all about story—narrative. Your biggest job as the GM is to provide the impetus for stories in the game. The Statement starts things off, and that might come from you or from the group as a whole, but the stories themselves arise out of gameplay, as guided by you. You present the events as they unfold because of what the PCs and NPCs do.

Crafting a good story is a topic that could fill a book of this size. Interested GMs should read books or articles aimed at fiction writers (many of which are available on the internet) that provide advice on plot. For that matter, similar sources about characterization can help in the creation of NPCs as well.

For now, remember these foundational concepts:

- Learn what motivates the players at your table. Exploration? Action? Mystery-solving? Interacting with NPCs? Cater to these desires.
- Learn what motivates the PCs that the players run beyond just investigating the paranormal. What are the characters' life goals? Hobbies? Ambitions? Who are their loved ones? Incorporate these things into the stories.
- Create stories that involve the PCs as directly as possible. If some sort of malignancy is plaguing people, have it affect the PCs or their loved ones, too. If monsters are haunting people's dreams, haunt the PCs' dreams too. Don't let the players feel like they are separated from the story. Make them a part of the story.
- Remember that the players are your co-storytellers, and that the PCs are the main characters of the story, so their

decisions should have direct impact on what happens.

- Weave multiple stories together. Have the PCs learn about the beginning of one story while they're still embroiled in another. Draw on the experiences (and characters and places) of past investigations for the current one.
- Vary your stories. Follow a grisly encounter involving The Slaughter with a creepy but not physically threatening mission involving The Lonely. Create an investigation that takes multiple sessions to play through, then follow it up with another that wraps up in a single game session.
- Vary the encounters within a story. Even in the middle of a series of horrific scenes of mayhem, there's always room for investigation or interaction (and it breaks things up).
- Not every story needs to be about saving the world. Sometimes the smaller stories about helping one person can be the most interesting.
- Twists and unexpected events are wonderful and should be used often, but sometimes the biggest twist is to have things go exactly the way the players think they will.
- Don't get bogged down justifying, rationalizing, or explaining every detail. The players aren't supposed to understand everything.
- Stories that involve a lot of events the PCs are unaware of will end up making little sense to the players, and should probably be avoided.
- Base your stories on real human emotion. Antagonists can be driven by greed or power, but also by love, longing, curiosity, or misguided altruism. Don't make your players just interact with the events—make them react to the emotions behind the events. Opponents should inspire actual hate and anger. The loss of a valued ally should inspire actual sadness and loss.
- The Entities should be at the heart of every story, but not every antagonist needs to be a cultist, a serial killer, or an Avatar. Think about Leitner or Salesa, for example. Neither is a servant of an Entity, but a story that involves them involves the Entities as well.
- Occasionally, create stories that are sequels to your previous stories. The decisions that the players made in the past affect things in the present. Villains return for another try at reaching their goal, or perhaps just for revenge.
- As this is a horror game, the monsters and NPCs are supposed to be extremely dangerous. Many found in chapter 12 can be taken down in a fight with PCs, but many more likely cannot. That's okay. "Defeating the monsters" is not the goal. Fights should be about survival, not victory, so don't worry about making the encounters "balanced." It's hard to be truly scared unless the opposition is superior to you.

Leitner: see The Book Collector, page 202

Salesa: see The Artefact Dealer, page 199

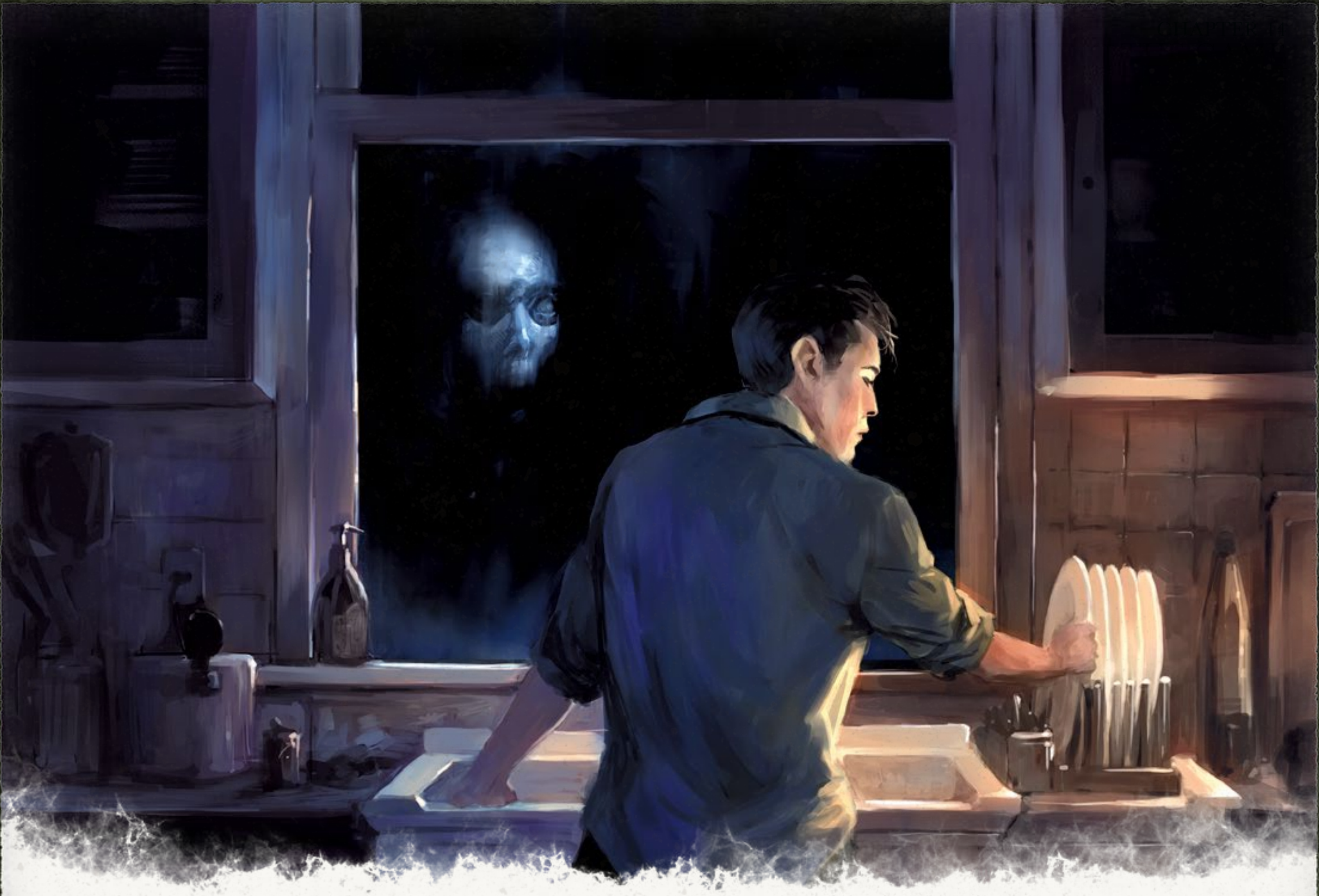
Plotting in an RPG isn't like plotting a novel—in fact, to do them in the same way is to court disaster. This is because a novelist plots everything out from start to finish, but in an RPG, what the characters do will change the plot of the story you're telling, and you can't know that ahead of time.

No, plotting in an RPG is more like coming up with story ideas that—once the PCs engage with them—become plots. So it's really more like creating potential plots.

But there's even more to it than that because between game sessions, you have to figure out what happens next. You're plotting, but plotting as you go.

Fiction writers call figuring out what happens next "pantsing," as in "plotting by the seat of your pants." Fiction writing has almost as much jargon as RPGs.

Let's say you set things up so the governor is secretly helping the cult, and the PCs investigate. In the last session, they exposed the governor's dirty deeds. Now, before the next session, you have to determine what comes next. Does the cult retaliate? Do they go into hiding? Something else?



A lot comes down to story pacing. Perhaps you give the PCs a break for a while to catch their breath before the cult strikes back. Or maybe you have them strike immediately to let the characters (and the players) know how significant their actions against the governor really were.

Pacing, page 324

MYSTERIES AND CLUES

Since most adventures in The Magnus Archives RPG involve investigations, often you'll be dealing with mysteries and clues. After reading a statement about a mysterious beast that lurked in a neighborhood and peered through windows before a young man disappeared from his home, the PCs are likely going to talk to people in the neighborhood and look for clues in places where the creature was spotted.

You can handle this in multiple ways as the GM, but there are two common approaches:

1. Make notes ahead of time of each clue. Mr. Johnson saw the beast through his kitchen window and got a good look at it. There are tracks hidden in Mrs. Harris's garden. The front door of the abducted young man's house was smashed, various rooms contain tufts of hair (the police tested some of them and ruled that they came from an unidentified breed of dog), and hidden in his closet is a book about mystic transformations.

2. Make notes about what actually happened and extrapolate information and clues from that. You know that the timing of the statement is backward. The young man disappeared and then there were sightings of a beast, because he transformed into a creature of The Hunt using his book (now hidden in the closet), smashed through the door, and ran around the neighborhood before vanishing into the night. Armed with that, in the game, you can let the players decide where to look and who to talk to and logically fill in what they learn without deciding ahead of time.

If the players think to look for a certain thing (signs of forced entry) or search a particular area (around the office), and there's something interesting to find, don't make them roll to find it. They've already "succeeded" by choosing the right thing or the right place.

If the players think of something reasonable that you hadn't planned on—like a doorbell camera that might have captured evidence—don't say no just because you didn't think of it. Reward them for smart thinking.

If you choose method 1, note that it's not a trail of clues. A trail where one clue leads to the next, which leads to the next, is always risky because what if the PCs don't find one? Is the investigation over? Always have a web of clues, and if there is a trail of any sort, have at least three opportunities for the PCs at each step.

Method 2 has the advantage of not requiring the PCs to go where you anticipated they would go. In fact, they can go where you never thought to plant a clue. They might think of something you never would have, like checking the doorbell camera on the house across the street.

TYPES OF ADVENTURES

Most investigations you'll run will be event based. This means that you'll prepare and run the adventure with the idea that if the PCs do action X, event Y happens, and if they do action A, event B happens. For example, if the PCs talk to Edgar, he tells them that he has no knowledge of the occult. If they search his garage, they find all sorts of mystical books as well as arcane symbols scrawled on the floor. The PCs can do either, both, or something else entirely.

Having the PCs feel a lot of time pressure can be an interesting way to increase the tension, but if overused, this technique will become irritating.

But event-based adventures are only one type of story. You could also create one that is location based. In this case, you'd sketch out a map of an area (maybe a creepy old apartment building or a mysterious section of woodlands) with locations marked on it. If the PCs go to a particular location, they'll find what's there. If they don't, they won't. This is great for when the PCs are exploring an important place, with foes, obstacles, and secrets located in specific areas.

Last, there are time-based stories. For these, you create a sort of timeline of things that will happen. This method is uncommon in a Magnus Archives campaign, but if you want to use it, you'd do something like this:

Say the PCs are after Niles, an Avatar of The Buried who wants to murder Emily in an occult ritual. You might create this timeline:

10 a.m. Thursday: The train leaves for Frankfurt.
11:32 a.m. Thursday: Niles murders Emily on the train.
11:45 a.m. Thursday: Niles begins the ritual in the empty passenger car.
12:10 p.m. Thursday: The ritual is complete.
12:16 p.m. Thursday: Niles hides the body in the baggage car.
2:45 p.m. Thursday: The train arrives in Frankfurt.
3:50 p.m. Thursday: Emily's body is discovered and reported to the authorities.
4:15 p.m. Thursday: Niles checks into an expensive hotel in Frankfurt.
9:30 a.m. Friday: Niles boards a train for Rome.

The idea is that as part of their investigation, the PCs may learn about Niles's plans and get on the train Thursday morning to stop him. The GM knows that they have until 11:32 to save Emily, and if they fail, they have until 12:10 to stop the ritual in the empty car. If they still fall short, they can catch up to him in the baggage car around 12:16. And if they do nothing, by Friday, Niles is on his way to Rome and Emily's murder is being investigated by the local police.

The schedule proceeds until the PCs intervene, and the timetable you create assumes no PC involvement.

SIDE PLOTS

In *The Magnus Archives* podcast, there are many side plots or subplots, and many of those eventually tie into or become a main plot. For example, Jonathan starts the first season trying to figure out what his predecessor Gertrude was up to. Later, he tries to look into the circumstances of her death. Eventually, learning what Gertrude knew and what she was trying to do becomes vital to the success of Jonathan and his allies.

You can and should introduce side plots into your campaign. Not only do they make your game and your stories feel more dynamic (there's more than one thing going on at a time), but the great thing about side plots is that they are typically player driven. They rely on the PCs being interested in something beyond the current investigation.

Examples of side plots include:

- An NPC important to a PC (a friend, relative, etc.) has something interesting going on.
- A PC wants to follow up on something that happened during a previous investigation.
- A PC wants to learn more from an NPC previously encountered.
- A PC wants to learn more about a topic that offers interesting opportunities for stories.
- An NPC asks a PC for help in what seems like a small matter, but grows into something larger.
- An NPC important to a PC has been keeping a secret from them.
- A PC is romantically interested in an NPC (or vice versa).
- An NPC important to a PC mysteriously disappears, starts acting strangely, or is in danger.
- The authorities are looking into the PCs based on something that happened in an investigation.
- One or more PCs has a rival that is attempting to undermine their investigation.

Not all side plots will involve the supernatural. The PCs might make a powerful organized crime syndicate angry with them, or a PC's brother might be lost in the mountains. Sometimes subplots can involve the supernatural, but only tangentially. For example, a PC's mother might be very ill, and they know of an occult book that holds the cure—but at what price?

CREATING A STATEMENT

Most episodes of the podcast include some kind of statement. As a rule of thumb, there should usually be a statement in every story at your table. Even if the story isn't about following up on a statement but instead deals with a threat confronting the PCs directly, there might be a valuable clue in an old statement that the PCs reference in the midst of the story.

Chapter 9: The Statement, page 157

Statements are very brief stories of a supernatural encounter or event that serve as a springboard for an investigation by the PCs. Narratively, they serve the purpose of setting the mood, and on a metagame level they prepare the players for what to expect (at least a little).

A statement for the game might be a little different from those in the podcast. The reason for this is that the PCs need things to do. There should always be plenty of loose ends or unexplained events. So worry less about whether the story the statement tells has a beginning, a middle, and an end. In truth, it's really just the beginning. The PCs' investigation is the middle and the end. They resolve the tale (if anyone does), not the statement.

Remember that almost every statement is given by a living person, and they do so in person. The exceptions include:

- A letter or historical record that is entered into the archives as a statement (usually still a written account—a first-person retelling of events that happened to the writer)
- A statement given by a nonhuman being
- A statement "pulled" out of a person by an Avatar of The Eye

Listening to a few episodes of The Magnus Archives *podcast will give you an idea of the scope of the story you want and the type of information to include. The cool people at Rusty Quill have made the transcripts of every episode available on their website.*

Archivists and investigators don't normally go looking for paranormal events. They don't see a news report on television that suggests occult activity and go investigate it. Obviously, PCs have autonomy and can do whatever they want, but proactive investigations or missions are the exception, not the rule.

One good example of such an exception is when characters discover that something is already catalogued in the archives and decide to follow up on it. Maybe it's a statement that got lost or misfiled and was never investigated originally. (That is, in fact, how the podcast starts out, before the larger story develops.)

THE GM-CRAFTED STATEMENT

While chapter 9 presents a method for creating the statement as a group (which is fun and helps include everyone), sometimes—maybe even most of the time—you'll want to create a statement yourself. This might be important to get the game rolling initially. Remember that even experienced roleplayers expect an adventure hook that pulls them into the story to start things off, so it might be hard for some players to wrap their mind around the idea of being involved in crafting that instigating hook. At least at first.

If this is the case, think of the horror tale you want to tell. It doesn't have to be long or involved. Think of a spooky campfire tale, a short story, or an episode of a horror TV show (or, obviously, an episode of a podcast). Don't think in terms of a movie or something larger. Keep it simple. For example: Someone heard disturbing noises coming from the apartment next door night after night, and when they tried to investigate, no one answered the door. Finally, they complained to the manager, who told them the apartment had been vacant for two months because the former tenants died in a terrible murder-suicide. Accompanied by the manager (with the key), the statement giver went into the neighboring apartment and confirmed that no one was there, and found no evidence of anything that could make the terrible sounds they heard. And that might be it—the whole statement, at its core.

The main advantage of crafting a statement yourself is that you can prepare for the investigation as you write it. You know the places, the NPCs, and the terrors involved and can get everything ready.

The disadvantage is that it's more work for you. And it's best if the statement is written out so the players can refer to it during their investigation.

Now, no one expects you to be Jonny Sims when you write this out. It doesn't have to be wonderfully written or contain fantastic prose or enthralling characterizations.

It does have to contain all the pertinent facts. These include:

- **The location.** Where did the events happen? The PCs will certainly be going there, so it's helpful to include further details about the location.
- **Time.** When did it happen?
- **The statement maker.** Who is relating the events? The PCs will probably speak with them as part of the investigation, if possible. If the statement gives an idea of what that person is like, it should be carried through to when the PCs meet them.
- **Other people involved.** If there are other witnesses, victims, perpetrators, and suspicious individuals, the PCs will want to interview them too, if possible.
- **Specific details about the paranormal events.** The PCs need to know what they're investigating, and that requires at least a couple of specific details. It's not enough that someone saw a ghostly figure. The PCs need to know what it was doing or other pertinent facts they can follow up on. Did it make a sound? What or who did it look like? Were there other events that seemed to precipitate the appearance?

To maximize the effectiveness, try to convey the emotions involved as well as the important details. If someone is describing something terrifying, they'll do it in a terrified way. If they're mourning someone who has died as a result of the events, that should be clear. If they're skeptical, that will come through as well. (You don't have to be subtle if you don't want to.)

Include what the statement maker experienced, or perhaps what they were told secondhand, but nothing more. It's unlikely a person off the street has ever heard of The Buried, so they won't name that Entity in the statement even if it is directly involved. Likewise, the statement won't have the motives of people other than the statement maker or provide insight into actions taken when the statement giver is not present.

It's a creepy story, told in first person. As long as that's what you deliver, you've done it correctly.

You don't have to write the statement verbatim if you don't feel you can do it justice or don't have the time. Instead, you can put together the highlights as bullet points with all the pertinent details.

And when in doubt (or desperate need), borrow a statement directly from the podcast. Even if the players have listened to that episode, you can change things up in their investigation, or simply have the PCs follow up on new information that goes beyond what happened in the podcast.

Recording the statements you craft (on your phone or whatever is handy) and then playing them back for the players saves you from having to write it all out and adds a bit of the podcast's flavor to your game, but you might want to have a written copy for the players to refer back to. Conversely, it might be easier to get a good reading/recording if you do write it out, if only for yourself.

THE GROUP-CRAFTED STATEMENT

Chapter 9 has a method for the group to create a statement together. This makes everyone feel involved and ties them to one of the familiar touchstones of the podcast.

In this method, the group is sort of "playing out" the instigating events. It can and should be creepy or unsettling to be part of this process. Even though it's not happening to characters the players are invested in, it's still spooky to see the events arise out of a joint conversation. No one person is crafting this horror, so in a way it might seem like it has a life or existence of its own.

While the group is engaged in this activity, try to keep them in a serious mood. The statement sets the tone for the whole adventure.

For you, the difficult part about crafting the statement this way is that you have to turn it into an adventure. The investigation may probe some or all of the details the players put into the statement, but the adventure will likely include other things not in the statement at all. The PCs will go beyond what they already know and unravel more information, more NPCs, and more terrifying situations.

So how do you take what the group crafted and turn it into the basis of a story that will thrill and perhaps surprise them? How do you honor what they created but give them even more?

The Distortion, page 216

The statement provides the starting point. The first person the PCs will want to find is the statement maker. The first place they will want to visit is the locale where the statement's events took place. So in a way, the group has done a lot of work for you.

Catalogue of the Trapped Dead, *page 270*

Key into who the people involved are, and prepare for them to be NPCs that the PCs interact with, if possible. Think about the places mentioned and what they look like when the PCs go there. What unanswered questions does the statement raise, and what are the most interesting answers to those questions?

Perhaps most important, think about what's not in the statement. If there's a house that's seemingly haunted, what lies in the rooms that don't get mentioned? What do the neighbors not noted in the statement say when the PCs talk to them?

The Vast, page 176

And probe deeper. Just because the statement maker believes that the house is haunted, there might be something else going on. Perhaps the forces of The Vast have opened some kind of doorway in the house, and the ghostly moaning that's been heard is the wind howling through this door into a realm of limitless space where one might fall forever. And perhaps the statement giver's sister, who is only casually mentioned in the statement, is the practitioner who opened it. You haven't contradicted anything in the statement, but you've delivered a surprising twist to the players' (and the characters') expectations.

Use the tools the setting provides you, even if they weren't present in the statement. Introduce a book or artefact involved in the events that the statement giver didn't know about or didn't understand. Make the mysterious being mentioned in the statement a monster or an Avatar of something else of your choosing. The statement doesn't limit you—it's a springboard.

And don't forget that you play a role in crafting the group statement too. If you want to involve The Distortion, insert a figure appropriate for that being (even though the statement giver certainly wouldn't know it by that name) into the statement, even if it's subtle. If you want a copy of the *Catalogue of the Trapped Dead* to be part of the mysterious events, suggest that there's a copy in the hands of someone mentioned in the statement. Plant the seeds you need, then allow them to bloom when the PCs get involved.

FROM STATEMENT TO PLAY AT THE GAME TABLE

The biggest obstacle you have in dealing with a group-crafted statement is probably time. The group gets together, creates the statement, and then turns to you, expecting the investigation to start. That's a difficult position to be in. Some GMs have great affinity for improv and can come up with a story using the statement as a springboard very quickly. Others might need a half hour of thinking and prep. Still others want a week. You should take whatever time you need. There is no right or wrong method. Each, however, has its own considerations.

No prep. You're ready at a moment's notice and you make it up as you go along. You improvise descriptions and portray characters as needed, and for the events that happen in the course of the investigation, either they come directly from the statement or you pull them out of thin air. You might even (secretly) rely on player ideas that come up during the investigation and incorporate them into your plans (because you have no plans—you're winging it!). If you can do this, pat yourself on the back and get to it.

The game session can begin with the group statement creation and move directly into gameplay. You might be able to make this a standard so that every game session starts with a new statement and the investigation is completed by the end of the session.

A little prep. The group crafts the statement, then you take your notes and go sit by yourself for a bit. The rest of the group takes a break, makes food or drinks, or maybe plays a quick card game. You've built this break into the evening's plans, so you don't have to stress about it. A half hour, an hour—use whatever it takes to figure out how to transform the details in the statement into the people, places, and things the PCs will experience. Jot down a few levels of important NPCs or obstacles that will come into play. Craft a few surprises that weren't in the statement to keep the players on their toes. Don't worry about preparing for every contingency, and don't feel like you have to prepare a complete story. Remember that the players are your co-storytellers. As you get more experience creating an adventure, the time you need might get shorter, or it won't get shorter but your adventures will be better.

If you choose this method, you probably won't complete the entire investigation in one session. Plan on the next session to be the one where the story is completed. Or make room for multisession investigations in your campaign, because you've had a bit of time to craft a more in-depth story.

Either way, you only have to prep for the first portion of the investigation. You can leave the end reveals, the exciting climax, and so on for the next session, which means you have a lot more time to prepare for those events, and to incorporate the PCs' actions from the first session into the second.

Lots of prep. You want to take your time. As with most RPGs, you want to have time between sessions to prepare for what happens next. You want to breathe life into the NPCs and the terrors involved, you want to maybe make props or visual aids, and you want the stats for the monster that threatens the PCs to be thoroughly thought out.

This means that the group-crafted statement is the end of the session, not the beginning, and the adventure it inspires happens next time. You could schedule this so that's just how the campaign goes. Session 1 is crafting the statement, session 2 is playing through the investigation, session 3 is crafting a new statement, session 4 is conducting that investigation, and so on.

Alternatively, you could craft the first statement yourself, play out that investigation, and leave time at the end of the session for the group to collaborate on a new statement. Then go from there, crafting next session's horror at the end of the current session each time.

HORROR

It's probably worth taking a moment to ask ourselves the most basic question: why run a horror game? Why not stick with regular fantasy or maybe sci fi?

The answer is simple.

Horror is the best genre for evoking emotion. You can evoke emotion with any well-crafted story, but horror triggers primal feelings, both fear and anxiety, but also glee and relief (when you realize that it's not real). A good GM can make the players experience actual unease or creepiness in the same way that a horror movie makes the viewers feel that way. You might not be able to evoke jump scares the way a movie might, but Magnus Archives horror isn't about jump scares. It's about slow, building creepiness.

That said, it's still a game. And games are meant to be fun. But the fun of a horror game comes from (safe) fear, from uncovering a mystery, and sometimes from experiencing some sort of personal success. This is different from the "defeat the bad guy, save the town" type of gaming. In another genre, the PCs might go up against a foe that is difficult to defeat in combat, and thus it's a real challenge. In horror, that foe might be impossible to

You can subtly glance behind a player who has their back to a door or window to give them the feeling that something's behind them, but don't overdo it. You're trying to subconsciously set them on edge, not actually make them feel afraid of something in the real world.

> The broken, juddering mummy began to drag itself towards me. It was still partially bound in the tight burial cloth, but that didn't stop it making its painstaking way over the dusty ground. There was plenty of room to run around it, it wasn't even that fast, but my legs just wouldn't work as it got closer and closer. Its mouth opened and closed stiffly, dark brown dust falling from it in a steady stream. I have no idea how it knew I was there. It had no eyes, no nose. There's no way it should have been able to detect me, but it knew, and crawled directly towards me.
>
> —MAG 64: "Burial Rites"

defeat in combat. While there might be other ways to overcome the challenge, sometimes the best solution is to run away screaming.

Mood and tone are crucial to horror. Be frank with the players and let them know that a steady stream of funny comments and whatnot don't fit the tone you're trying to set.

Consider dimming the lights. Some creepy music played softly in the background can contribute to the mood. Burn a candle.

Sit in the room so that the players' backs are to a door and a window, because the more open space lies at your back, there's always that feeling that something is behind you. You can bring in (minor, subtle) real-world discomfort to help convey the mood you want for the fiction of the game.

MATURE THEMES

Sometimes, it's appropriate to involve mature themes in horror games. Sex, extreme violence, and other topics can certainly fit into the world of The Magnus Archives. But each group must decide for themselves if such themes fit into their game. You should also prepare your stories with your specific players in mind. If one or more are very young or have issues with certain topics, avoid things that would be inappropriate. Also be aware that some topics, like overt sexuality, rape, and graphic violence might disturb players even when you aren't expecting it. It's always best to know for certain before allowing these topics into your game.

Think of it like the movie rating system. If you can tell the story that you want to tell in a G or PG (or even PG-13) way, you're likely fine. If events unfold that will give your game an R rating or higher, it's best to talk with your players ahead of time. It's not a matter of good or bad, but a matter of appropriateness for the audience and giving people a heads-up ahead of time—just like movie ratings.

CREATING TENSION

We use the word "tension" in daily life to mean bad things. Tension means we're worried about something. Tension gives us headaches and backaches. Tension in a roleplaying game, however, can be used in the same way that it's used in fiction. And it's crucial for horror.

RAISING THE STAKES

In fiction, a story begins with an inciting incident. That's true for most RPG stories as well, and in The Magnus Archives RPG, the inciting incident is almost always a statement. It creates tension. A young boy has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Ghostly bells were ringing in the abandoned church tower.

So there's tension right away in the story—something's gone wrong, someone's in trouble, or something needs an explanation. But you've got to keep up the pressure or that tension can fade over time.

One of the phrases you'll hear related to tension in fiction is "raising the stakes." This means that things become even more important to the characters (and the players). This can occur when their opponents pose bigger threats (the missing boy appears to be part of a string of disappearances) or more personal threats (the disappearance is related to the mystery of what happened to a PC's sister).

The most obvious way to raise the stakes is to put the PCs in jeopardy. They track down the horrible creature that has stolen the child, but it strikes out at them. Now they're directly in danger.

Another way to raise the stakes is with a twist. The PCs track down the missing child and learn that members of a weird religious sect have spirited him away not for some nefarious purpose, but because they believe only he can save them from a creature of pure darkness that hunts them. These kinds of twists knock the PCs (and the players) off-kilter a bit and force them to reassess the situation and their actions. This increases the tension.

THE UNKNOWN

Nothing is better at creating tension than that which we don't know or understand. A closed door is inherently more stressful than an open one, even if we see a terrible monster on the other side of the open doorway. Because the threat we imagine behind the closed door is always worse.

Questions are more interesting than answers. Questions intrigue. They encourage speculation and theories. They are mysteries begging to be solved, potential threats waiting to strike, and possible victories waiting to be achieved. They are the very definition of story tension.

Answers (unless they raise more questions) do the opposite. They confirm and define. They refute speculation and theories. That's not to say that you should never answer a question, but keep in mind that you'll get more response from a player by posing a question than by giving them background exposition. "Folks have always been wary of Route 13 in the month of October" creates more intrigue than "A man who murdered his wife six years ago in October lived out by Route 13." The latter is just a fact. It's a closed issue, and it might be a logical explanation for why the locals feel weird about that stretch of road.

A question is a quest (see how the words are related?). If something weird is going on by Route 13, maybe the PCs investigate and learn that something is enticing people to commit murder out there. But if everyone has a logical explanation for people's unease, there's nothing to do. And doing things is the very core of stories, RPG or otherwise. An answer is the end of a quest. When we have the answer, the quest—the thing that needs doing—is over.

So fill your stories and sessions with things that are unknown. Human nature makes the players assume that the blank spots are filled with things they might find interesting.

If you put questions in the setting or plot, you need to have answers. Or at the very least, the illusion of answers. You should know why people don't like Route 13, or you should at least imply that there's a reason, even if you haven't figured it out yet. From a GM's point of view, you've decided that something supernatural is going on out there, and if the PCs investigate, they'll find interesting things.

The metagaming danger is that if the players think you don't have answers for their questions, they won't ask them. They won't even assume that the questions are questions at all. You might, for example, place an old mirror in a spooky house that won't show the reflection of one of the PCs, hoping that the question it raises (why don't they have a reflection?) will intrigue the players and lead them to discover something strange about the mirror and the house. But the players might never ask that question because they might think you just put something spooky or weird into the adventure for flavor. That's a lousy assumption on their part, and it usually comes either from having had a bad GM in the past, or from you inadvertently teaching them that you don't always do things for a reason.

Cosmic horror, page 343

That's why the illusion of an answer is as good as an answer. Players don't need to know everything, but they need to believe that you do, or that you can come up with what's needed when it's needed.

This ties into the twists we already discussed. Because sometimes something is unknown but we think it's known. We don't think there's anything dangerous on the other side of the door, but when we open it, a terrible monster is glaring. Subverting expectations is a fantastic tension-builder. As soon as the players are absolutely convinced that they understand something, it might be time to alter that thing.

And sometimes, you want to make everything known to players (at least if they're paying attention) and give them no twists. Why? Three reasons. First, if the players discover the truth about a situation or a place (through reconnaissance, research, magic, or whatever), they should be rewarded. Second, if the players use that information to make a plan and it goes well, that in itself is a fun and novel experience. It makes players feel smart. Last, if there's *always* a twist, they expect it. They learn not to plan, because plans never work. Sometimes the best twist is that there's no twist at all!

LOOSE ENDS AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

The Magnus Archives podcast leaves us with a fair share of unresolved matters. While we come away from the overall story feeling very satisfied, not every loose end is tied up neatly.

This is a good thing.

Matters left unresolved leave open doors for further investigations. They leave questions to answer and shroud your stories in a layer of mystery as well as the unknowable aspects of cosmic horror.

EVOKING EMOTION

There's probably no greater moment for a GM than when you create situations that affect the players emotionally in the way that a sad story makes someone sad or a horror story makes someone scared. We all know it's not real, it's just a story, but good stories bring out real emotions.

The GM who has the devious NPC suddenly betray the PCs gets the players (not just the characters, but the *players*) to react with real anger or indignation. The GM who describes the ghostly hand that suddenly brushes against a PC's cheek gives the player momentary but literal chills. The GM who has a kindly NPC give the starving PCs their last bit of food causes the players to be legitimately touched.

What's more, if you do this consistently, you'll encourage the players to do the same for other players. When a character sacrifices their life so that their friends can survive, the other players are moved—it's both a sad and a noble moment. By creating an environment where real emotions from fictional situations are not only safe, but encouraged (rather than being embarrassing), you give the players room to feel and to take actions that will evoke emotions in the others.

DESCRIBING THE HORROR

Once you've started your campaign and the first session has begun, you need to get used to describing what the characters see, hear, smell, feel, and even taste. You're their senses. In fact, you're the only conduit through which they get information about the fictional world. If you don't say it, the players don't know about it, and the characters don't experience it. Description is very important. You want to be clear, evocative, and as concise as possible while still accomplishing the first two.

Similarly, you've got to bring NPCs to the table and have the PCs meet them. You

With descriptions, being concise is important. Go on too long with descriptions, and the players' minds will drift. Sometimes, what works best are short, declarative, evocative descriptions with pauses in between for player comments or questions.

need to describe them, of course, but because they're people (or creatures or whatever), they can present themselves just as surely as a player presents their character. They speak, they act, and they react. How they do so will be fun and memorable or it won't. Sometimes, your experience being a player in RPGs will help you create interesting and compelling NPCs.

Description is vital in horror—both in what you say and in what you don't. Although precision is a good thing, pedantic, exhaustive detail is not. Even if that's what is needed to fully describe the monster or phenomenon, don't do it. Leave the players with an impression rather than an exact description. "A creature that looks like three black beetles, each the size of a mastiff, with too many legs and eyes" isn't a full description, but it's an impression. It gives the players something to picture, even if it's not precisely what you're picturing. It's weird and evocative, and that's important.

ADVANCED DESCRIPTION

GM description is the game master telling the players what they see, hear, smell, and so on. (Don't forget about smell, by the way—it's always particularly evocative.) But description can be so much more as well.

First of all, don't overlook the cues you give to players by what you talk about, as opposed to just what you say. If you spend table time describing something in detail, it should be important. Don't spend a great deal of time describing a rat scurrying down a drainage pipe unless somehow that rat is the key to the whole scene. Whatever you dwell on, the players will dwell on.

For particularly important scenes or people, you can write down the description ahead of time and read it at the table. This accomplishes two things—it makes that description precisely what you want it to be, with the proper elegance (or terror), and it is an obvious cue to the players that what you're describing is important. Be aware, however, that if you do this a lot, the exact opposite will happen, and the players will start to tune it out. They're not there to be read to—they want to be part of a game.

> I shook my head and turned to leave, but as I did so, I saw a small flash of colour in the bath. I pulled back the white curtain and looked down. Surrounding the edges of the plug's pristine chrome was a small halo of purple. I leaned over to get a closer look. It appeared to be some sort of fungus, scrubbed away so only the faintest traces remained. There was a spongy, fibrous look to it, and I had the sudden image of long, soft tendrils stretching away down through the pipes. It was the colour of a fresh bruise and smelled sour, like old milk.
>
> —MAG 93: "Contaminant"

Another tactic is to describe things only generally and allow the players to ask questions. By asking, "Are there a lot of books in the bookcase?" what they're actually telling you is "I go over and look at the bookcase." In other words, you're creating a situation where, by asking for more information, the player is telling you what their action is. And because your general description doesn't focus on any one object or person in the scene, you're not giving metagame clues by accidentally providing too much detail about the important things.

However, sometimes you might *want* to give metagame clues. You want to subtly draw the players' attention to the grandfather clock next to the bookcase, because that's where the important diary has been stashed, so you give it a bit of emphasis in your description. Maybe an extra sentence or a stressed word, or maybe you look into one player's eyes just as you mention the clock. What you're doing is acknowledging that the PCs are smart, perceptive, attentive, and lucky, so the important parts of a scene are more likely, perhaps, to draw their attention in the same way that Sherlock Holmes might go right to the clock based on insight, observation, and intuition.

In poker, players can detect when another player is bluffing by unconscious mannerisms they display called "tells." Become aware of your own tells as a GM. If dark-haired men are always sinister, outgoing young women are always trustworthy, or evil occultists always live in trailer parks, these are tells and your players will pick up on them. Make sure that the information you convey with your descriptions is the information you *want* to convey. You can accidentally reveal the murderer in a mystery by dwelling on them too long, but sometimes you can do the same thing by not focusing on them enough. Listening is an important GM skill, and sometimes, that means listening to yourself.

DESCRIBE WITH EMOTION

This is a tricky subject because you don't want to tell the players how their characters feel, yet as humans we perceive the world through a lens of emotion. Certain sounds are terrifying. Some sights delight us or give us hope (depending on the situation). Injecting emotions into your descriptions—again, done carefully—can add a great deal of impact. Consider the following examples:

"Then, over the hill, through the mist, you see a glimmer of light. Dawn arrives like a savior, bringing with it hope and relief as the creatures of darkness throughout the field slip into the shadows."

"The insidious psychic intrusion slips into your mind like a serpent, slithering its way into the nooks and crannies of your consciousness, a thing of pure revulsion and fear."

"The cozy warmth and light within the old woman's home, the smell of freshly baked cookies, and the soft, well-worn chairs in her living room bring a moment of calm to your heart."

These descriptions aren't outright intrusive, but they convey emotions in addition to sensory input. In this way, your description does double duty. It conveys both information and tone. The difference between "You see a withered old tree with branches swaying in the wind" and "The dead tree, silhouetted by the dying light of day, looks like an old crone, beckoning you into a trap with her withered limbs" is huge without having to be so overt as saying "You are creeped out by the tree."

DON'T PROVIDE SPECIFICITY UNLESS ASKED

You don't need to tell the players how many crates are in the storeroom. In fact, you shouldn't—not only because it's almost certainly not important, but also because the implication is that someone took the time and counted. An exact count of items or even people (if there are more than, say, five) should almost never be in your initial description.

Even afterward, don't provide an accurate count unless a player asks for it. A player asking that question is actually stating an action. They're basically saying, "I count the number of people in the bar" or, perhaps more appropriately, "I try to get a clear picture of the situation."

To instill a little unease in your game, consider how unsettling it can be to *never* give certain precise details. If you tell the players that the monster has "too many legs," that conveys both information and mood in a way that telling them it has ten legs never would. If a hulking, shambling thing looms over the players but you never give it a precise height, each player will, in turn, conjure up their own mental image of what that means.

You can do the same with things like direction and distance. It's hard to know precisely which direction a strange knocking sound is coming from when you're exploring a creepy old house. Did it come from upstairs or from the next room over? Realistically, it's hard to tell. Narratively, it's effective not to tell. The unknown quality of it is creepy. Similarly, deep in a dark underground tunnel system, can the PCs really tell that the

menacing figure stands 35 feet (11 m) away? Distance is something that most people are actually *bad* at estimating. Even if you give the PCs credit for being capable, the exact distance between two things might take them some time to estimate.

Of course, you can vary your descriptions based on the character. A scientist or a park ranger might be able to calculate that the top of the hill is 450 feet (137 m) away, but to a computer programmer it's just "pretty far." Likewise, you might say to the person playing an automotive enthusiast that they see a 2023 Ford Mustang Mach-E, whereas everyone else just sees a "recent-model two-door blue car." The additional information appropriate to a character can come immediately, or it can come later.

In other words, eschew the idea that you're describing an objective reality. Putting aside the philosophical debate regarding whether there even is such a thing, remember that the description you provide is what the players perceive, not necessarily what is there. "You see a shadow moving in the trees." That's all you give them because that's all they can perceive, at least at that moment. In the players' minds, they each might see a different shape of shadow. One might imagine a lurking assailant while another might think it's a deer. That's okay, because that's actually the way it works. Ask three different people to give an accounting of an event after the fact and you'll get three different descriptions.

Play with the fact that we are all our own unreliable narrator. Characters might mistake a house settling for something more dangerous. One PC might be sure that there are four foes, while another is aware of only three. Sometimes the snapping twig in the distance is never explained. Sometimes the heroes don't realize that the monster was a man in a mask until he's lying unconscious at their feet after they've beaten him up.

Play with the fact that we are all our own unreliable narrator.

USE THE SHARED EXPERIENCES OF YOUR FRIENDS

Use any sort of common experience you have with one or more of your players. “This church looks a little bit like the big Methodist church on Maple Street, except with a huge statue of an angel in front.” This is a sort of secret language that you and your close friends share, and you should use it. Your GM voice—the words you use to describe and narrate—doesn’t need to be detached or authorial. Sometimes a description that’s more casual or familiar conveys more details.

COSMIC HORROR

As much as genre (and subgenre) labels are useful at all, The Magnus Archives can be labeled not just as horror, but more specifically as *cosmic* horror.

Obviously, the roots of cosmic horror come from writers like Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, and—most prominently—H.P. Lovecraft and those who followed in his wake. The Magnus Archives is not strictly Lovecraftian, and it certainly is not a part of the Cthulhu Mythos, but we can benefit from looking at the icons of cosmic horror to understand the general milieu a bit better.

The horror of cosmic horror comes from scary monsters, knife-wielding maniacs, spooky things in the dark, and so on—just like it does in plenty of other types of horror. Cosmic horror, however, places all these things within a larger canvas focused on one specific fear: the fear of the unknown. And not just the fear of not knowing what’s down the dark alleyway, but the fear of not knowing the true nature of reality. The fact that we are mere specks in a vast universe, not just insignificant, but incapable of significance or even understanding in the scope of the mindbogglingly infinite and the forces at play within—that’s the essence of cosmic horror.

Although racism is sadly quite prevalent in early cosmic horror stories—particularly those from Lovecraft—it has no place in the setting or stories of The Magnus Archives.

The Entities represent these cosmic forces. While they prey upon humanity (and, in fact, all living things), they are as different and removed from us as we are from the single-celled organisms in the surface of a tidal pool. And if you’re going to say, “Hey, wait a minute, Jonathan Sims stopped them in his universe at the end of the podcast and he was just a human,” remember that he was able to do so only because he had the powers of The Eye at his disposal, and thus was likely closer to the Entities at that point than he was to being human. And in the even larger picture, his success was really just him playing the part of a pawn in a plan by The Web. So yes, humanity in this setting remains insignificant in the cosmic sense. Nevertheless, if *The Magnus Archives* podcast teaches us anything, it’s that we insignificant humans still have truly compelling stories to tell. And that’s where you and your group come in.

If you’re not familiar with Lovecraft or Cthulhu, they’re not that important to our purposes here, but if you want to learn more, everything you’d ever want to know (and much, much more) is just an internet search away.

One of the keys to cosmic horror lies in our inability to completely understand and define the forces at play. You’re reading this in a rulebook, but honestly, there are no

Don’t design a scenario that can come to a dead stop if the PCs botch one roll. There should always be multiple paths to success.

THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

As mentioned, you are the eyes and ears of the players. They can't know anything about the world unless you tell them. Make sure that the information you provide is both precise and concise. Be evocative, but not to the point that the players lose details in the language you use. Be open to answering their questions about the world around them.

Sometimes it's easy: a PC looks over the top of the hill, and you tell them what they see. Other times things are hidden, or there's a chance that they miss something important—secret panels, ghostly figures, creatures with natural camouflage, details of significance in a crowded marketplace, and so on. In these cases, perhaps a roll is involved. But it's odd to ask players to roll when they haven't taken any actions. It's within the bounds of the rules, but it can be jarring. There are different ways to handle the situation: you can call for a roll, compare levels, or use an intrusion.

GM Calls for Rolls: This is the most straightforward approach. It's always the best choice if a PC's action is to search, listen, or otherwise keep an eye out. If a PC is on watch while their comrades rest, call for an Intellect roll immediately and use the result if anything happens during the entire time they are guarding.

But what if the PC isn't actively looking? Let's say a pickpocket moves up behind them to lift their wallet, so you ask the player to make an Intellect roll with a difficulty equal to the pickpocket's level. (Arguably, they could make a Speed-based roll to see if they are quick enough to catch a glimpse—it's up to you.) Some PCs are skilled in perception, and that would come into play here. Success means that you tell the character what they see, and failure means that they notice nothing. However, the player knows that they had to make a roll, so they know that something was up. One way to keep players on their toes is to call for rolls when there is nothing to notice.

GM Compares Levels: You can take the player out of the equation (so as not to alert their suspicions) by comparing the PC's tier to the difficulty of the perception task. Ties go to the PC. You can still figure in skills and assets as bonuses to the PC's tier. So a third-tier character trained in perception will spot the level 4 predator cat stalking up behind them. This method is particularly good for determining simple results, such as whether the PC hears a river in the distance. That kind of thing isn't worth a roll, but for some reason, you might not want to give out the information automatically. This method also rewards a perceptive character, who will hear the noise before anyone else. Don't forget to increase the difficulty for distance in such a situation.

GM Intrudes: Rarely, you can keep things to yourself and spring the knowledge of what happened as a GM intrusion. If the PC discovers that their pocket is now empty of coins, that's certainly a complication. Sometimes the "discovery" itself is a complication—for example, the character notices a mugging going on in the alley as they walk by.

FAILURE TO NOTICE

If PCs miss a sensory detail, you should consider very carefully what to do about it. If there's an important clue under the table in the office, maybe a perceptive PC should just find it (no roll required), particularly if they said they were looking. To do otherwise might mean submitting to the tyranny of the dice. Just because the PC rolled a 2, should the adventure come to a dead stop?

Well, in the first place, don't design a scenario that can come to a dead stop if the PCs botch one roll. There should always be multiple paths to success.

In the second place, consider your other options. Maybe the PCs will learn of the existence of the clue later and they'll have to backtrack to find it. If the characters don't find the clue under the table, an NPC might—and then lord it over them with a show of superiority. If all else fails, as noted above, sometimes discovery is a complication, and you can simply foist it upon a PC through GM intrusion. In such a case, however, you might want to include a challenge. For example, the PC finds a secret door accidentally by leaning against a hidden control pad, which makes a great deal of noise, alerting the Avatar of The Dark in the next room.

On the other hand, perhaps in such a situation, the PCs didn't "earn" the discovery—if there was no roll, then no Effort was used and no risks were taken. That's not good. Maybe the PCs just miss out this time. Maybe they should learn to be more observant.

In other words, the answer depends on the situation. Don't hesitate to vary things. It keeps the players guessing.

rules governing the supernatural forces of the Entities. We don't even truly know if there are fourteen Entities, one Entity, or some other number. In fact, maybe the idea of numbering and categorizing them is not even appropriate. For another matter, what is an Avatar? How does a person become one? The exact process seems unclear—and that's the point. It's beyond full human comprehension.

While cosmic horror can be nihilistic, it doesn't have to be gloomy all the time. You can still have moments of hope, and the PCs can still experience small victories. They're not going toe to toe with the Entities, but they're doing small things that hold those forces at bay, at least for a little while.

Nevertheless, if The Magnus Archives podcast teaches us anything, it's that we insignificant humans still have truly compelling stories to tell.

MAGNUS ARCHIVES HORROR

What are the ingredients that make a Magnus Archives story? What sets it apart from other types of horror? The distinctions are nuanced but important, and while some relate to the format—statements and follow-up investigations—others deal with theme and similar aspects.

- Fear
- The supernatural
- Sacrifice
- Family (including found family)
- Flawed—even corrupt—"heroes"
- Villains motivated by delusions of grandeur and nihilism

FEAR

This is a horror game, after all, so it almost goes without saying that The Magnus Archives is about fear. But as you may know from listening to the podcast, it's more than that. The very heart of the setting and the impetus to every story are humanity's fears literally given life (of a sort). The cosmic Entities involved are these manifestations, and they are as mysterious and unknowable as any "Great Old Ones" that you might be familiar with in other stories.

It's worth remembering that these aren't malevolent gods that feed on fear, but rather they *are* the fear. More fear makes them stronger because they are that fear. It's like a cancer growing stronger by spreading through the body, but in this case "the body" is composed of all the conscious living beings on Earth.

That means that everything they or their servants do comes back to fear. The Dark breeds darkness because of the fear inherent within it. The Slaughter isn't interested in carnage itself, but rather the terror, dread, and/or shock it gives us. While an Avatar of The Desolation might be a pyromaniac that delights in seeing things burn, their awful master only cares about the fear engendered by the pain and loss of burning things.

When creating a story for this game, think about which of the Entities is involved. The circumstances might suggest that more than one could be, for remember that they are all intertwined in a way that we don't fully understand, and likely once were all a single Entity.

The Entities, page 166

THE SUPERNATURAL

Ghosts, psychic powers, inhuman monsters capable of impossible actions, people returning from the dead—all of these weird and wondrous elements exist in the setting, as well as many more. There really is nothing too outré that couldn't be a part of a Magnus Archives story.

Character death, page 136

All supernatural elements are based in fear. If something unnatural is going on, its essence ultimately comes from the Entities. There is no "good magic." There are no random supernatural events. If something spooky happens, it happens to further the power, the aims, and the growth of the Entities of fear.

People might believe that there is magic in the world they can harness for their own ends, or that the supernatural can be used to fight evil, but ultimately, such things always magnify the manifestation of fear. It's a vicious circle (and part of the nature of the cosmic horror involved) that sometimes the only way to fight the supernatural is to use the supernatural, but in so doing, you only make the forces you oppose stronger in the long run.

Occultist, page 51

An Occultist might use some power to stop the forces serving The Buried from completing the ritual of the Sunken Sky, which can be seen as a temporary victory against that particular Entity, but in the larger picture, the Entities collectively are strengthened. If you're in quicksand, you can struggle to get out, but your struggles eventually drag you deeper into the muck.

That isn't to say that such powers shouldn't be utilized. Sometimes it's the only way to survive—the only way to hold the Fears off.

The Entities of fear have no counterparts. There are no gods of hope or goodness. No supernatural agency steps in to protect us or give aid. The only opposition the Entities face comes from humanity, which is appropriate because humanity otherwise serves as their victims and their fodder. It's them versus us.

SACRIFICE

The forces arrayed against humanity are vast and powerful. How can the characters possibly hope to succeed? Unfortunately, it's almost always through some sort of personal sacrifice.

Sacrifice doesn't have to mean character death, although it certainly can. Sacrifice can entail the loss of a character's goal, their money, their self-esteem, their beliefs, or their principles.

As a GM, you can engineer situations that encourage or even require such sacrifices. If the PCs are trapped, their only means of escape might be one character staying behind so the others can go free. A PC might be forced to make a choice between saving one of the other PCs or an innocent person (NPC) in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or a PC might make the ultimate sacrifice and throw themselves in front of a deadly attack to save their friends.

Sacrifice should never happen accidentally or inadvertently. Make sure the characters know what's at stake and what the (potential) consequences of their actions might be. Consider this situation: Three PCs are trapped in a train car with an erratic and cruel Avatar of The Lonely, who has a gun and hates being in enclosed places with other people. She quickly descends into a manic, agoraphobic fit—she is probably going to kill them. The doors are locked and they cannot run. They could try to get the gun, but they know that one of the characters would likely get seriously hurt or worse. However, one of the PCs, Charlie, knows through research that this particular Avatar has the ability to absorb the memories of others. Charlie offers her the chance to take one of his memories in exchange for all three of them going free. The Avatar tells Charlie (and thus the GM tells the player) exactly what she wants. "I'll take your most loving, warmest memory of your mother," she says, almost hungrily. "I'll take it and throw it away so it's gone forever."

Charlie stoically agrees, making a huge sacrifice to save his friends.

FAMILY

Those that serve the Entities are nothing if not intricately connected to one another. Sometimes, they are literally blood relatives. Julia Montauk, who serves The Hunt, is the daughter of Robert Montauk, who serves (at least indirectly) The Dark. Peter Lukas doesn't just ally himself with The Lonely; he comes from an entire family who serves that Entity.

This means that when the PCs encounter someone who is involved with the supernatural, it's possible—perhaps even likely—that they will discover someone related to them who is involved as well. Perhaps the related character serves the same ends but in a different capacity. Perhaps they represent a succession of power. Or perhaps they serve a different Entity in a different manner altogether. The point is, the supernatural spreads along family lines not unlike a virus.

And not all such "families" are blood relatives. These misguided fools and psychopathic villains cling together in tight-knit groups. Sometimes they refer to themselves as a religion, like the Cult of the Lightless Flame. Other times the connecting tissue is more esoteric, as with the Fairchilds, people who serve The Vast and adopt the same surname but aren't actually related.

On the flip side, the concept of family arises in a different way. The PCs will, over time, take on an aspect of found family that creates bonds difficult to sever. Even as one character begins to change and become something slightly terrifying, the other characters should feel both willing and obligated to stand by them.

Speaking of characters growing terrifying…

Cult of the Lightless Flame, page 171

The Vast, page 176

Breekon & Hope
DELIVERIES

BEING A DYNAMIC GM

With some practice, you can take your GMing to the next level.

MOVING AROUND

There's a temptation to sit at the game table, perhaps half hidden by a GM screen, and run the whole game from that sedentary position. But consider how much more dynamic you can be if you stand up and move around. Your gestures become larger, you ensure that everyone can see your face, and you'll energize yourself in ways that will help bring excitement to the game. If something happens to one player's character in particular, get up and walk over to them. Use your whole body to gesture, not just your hands. If the PCs speak to a penitent monk, bow your head and don't look anyone in the eye. If the military commander is chewing them out, stand over them imperiously with your chest thrust forward and your face grim. When they go into the old factory at night, lurk behind the players as they sit at the table so that sometimes they're not sure what you're doing or where you are. This is the very definition of dynamic GMing.

Of course, you don't have to stand or walk around the whole time. In fact, you should do it as a way to punctuate and convey the mood. When things happen with sudden action, leap to your feet!

VOICES

Not everyone can do an array of voices and accents. But practically everyone can make their voice lower, higher, louder, softer, and so on. Attach a vocal quality to every major and some not-so-major NPCs. Even if you have a range of only five different voices, use them all. As long as you space them out and don't have two low-speakers right after each other, you'll still be using your voice effectively to convey character.

Obviously, overblown, racist accents are never a good idea.

Avatars, page 89

FLAWED HEROES

Sometimes characters aren't wholly good. Altruistic, perhaps, but not wholesome. Not without some moral failings and questionable actions.

Some characters do what they do for ulterior motives—to learn what happened to their missing brother, to make a name for themselves in occult circles, to get more likes on social media, and so on. They're not true heroes.

Other characters are more than willing to use unsavory means to get what they want. They don't hesitate to break into places to get information, rough up people they're questioning, and maybe worse.

Once in a while, in a dark setting such as this, a character must use downright horrific means to achieve a desired end. They might become an Avatar of one of the Entities in order to fight against the Entities, using the mystic abilities they're granted to further that fight, even though they know that, in the end, such tactics will likely doom them.

VILLAINS MOTIVATED BY DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR AND NIHILISM

While the Entities are too vast, too powerful, and too alien to fight against directly, the villains that characters can oppose—and perhaps sometimes defeat—are the humans that choose to serve the dark forces. But why do such a thing? Why work *with* Entities of fear to turn all existence into an eternal terror-filled hellscape? One word: power.

These misguided souls believe that when some kind of apocalypse comes thanks to their

Being true to the mood of the podcast, or to horror in general, supersedes any rule in this book.

actions, they won't fall victim to the horrors unleashed. They'll be not only spared but rewarded for their faithfulness and hard work. The belief that you've got secret knowledge that few others possess and that it will put you in a position of power is an enticing and compelling one. It makes you feel special, and it gives you hope where you might otherwise never have any.

And then there are people who seem to take physical and emotional pleasure in serving the Entities. They delight in spreading fear and relish the specific aspect of the Entity they favor. The Avatars and servants of The Desolation, for example, love to burn things. They love to destroy and inflict pain with their cherished fire. As they use the abilities their master grants them, their master grows in power, and thus so do they. It will lead to the inevitable, eventual downfall of those servants, but in the meantime, it's quite a rush.

PREPARING FOR THE GAME SESSION

This game doesn't require you to spend hours carefully designing stats for NPCs (unless you want to). There aren't a lot of rules to memorize. It's not worth writing out elaborate descriptions of each encounter because if you let things proceed organically, many planned encounters might not be used. The simplicity of the rules allows you to come up with a lot of the details as you go along, since you don't have to reference loads of books and stats during the game session.

To prepare for a session, you need to create only three things: a list of names, a brief outline, and a list of ideas.

1. A list of appropriate names
No matter how much you prepare, you'll end up creating some NPCs on the fly, so have a list of names to use when this happens. Leave room to write a quick note next to each name you use in case that NPC shows up in the game again.

2. A brief outline
The outline is an idea of where you think the story could go. Of course, the key word is *think*. You can't know for certain—the actions of the PCs will take things in unexpected directions. In truth, "outline" is probably not the right word. Think in terms of places the PCs might go, people or creatures they might interact with, and events that might occur. For example, let's say the PCs are investigating a mysterious disappearance in a small rural town. Your notes might look like the following.

Julia Corden disappeared from the parking lot of the big box hardware store where she worked. North of town.

Julia lived in a small, run-down rental house. Partner: Angela—distraught and prone to drink.

Store: Home Center. About thirty employees.

Manager: Bill Barnett (level 2). Surly. Trying to cover up the disappearance because he doesn't want the publicity. Denies everything.

Witness: Marie Hart saw Julia disappear right in front of her. Doesn't want to talk about it because she's afraid she'll lose her job (level 4 to get her to talk). Knows Julia recently found a strange item—looked like a large silver coin with a spiral symbol on it.

Security footage: Shows Julia's disappearance, then the video goes blank. Need to convince manager to see it (level 4) or sneak into the store's back offices.

Intrusion idea: Local corrupt deputy Woodrow (level 3) harasses PCs while they're in town (he's looking for a bribe to leave them alone). Friend of Bill Barnett.

Local priest: Father Rorvick. Has seen small coins like the one Marie describes and says they *are symbols of a "devil cult." Thinks the cult might be holed up in an old farmhouse east of town.*

And so on.

Obviously, that's just the beginning, but you've covered a lot of the contingencies. Some of that material might not get used. The PCs might not go to her partner—only to the store and then to the priest. Maybe they won't go to the priest at all, and you'll need to have someone else direct them to the farmhouse. Or maybe the PCs will come up with a wholly unexpected path of investigation.

3. A list of ideas

Just like with the list of names, jot down a bunch of random ideas. These are things you can throw into the game at a moment's notice if needed or appropriate. They might be flavor, cool visuals, or important side plots. For example, your list might include:

- A music box from the 1800s with ornate but slightly macabre decoration, currently broken
- A man with one side of his face horribly burned long ago
- Graffiti painted on the side of a building: "I saw it. And worse, it saw me."
- Dogs constantly barking in the distance, then silence
- A trail of blood that leads to a door that won't open

These are all ideas that you can sprinkle into the game when appropriate. You haven't tied them to a specific encounter, so you can insert them whenever you want. You might not use them all in the same adventure—they're just ideas.

AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Sometimes the best way to understand a game is to see it played. This section provides the next best thing: a script depicting a group playing through an encounter in an investigation in The Magnus Archives RPG.

GAME MASTER: Just as the original statement suggested, there's a wooden shack near the river. It looks old, and the years have been unkind. The door is on the side facing the river.

SUSAN (playing Audrey, a second-tier Cautious Protector Who Carries a Gun): Does it look like it's still used? Does anyone live there?

GM: It's tough to know that without investigating further, but there's no sign of anyone moving inside.

DOM (playing Chris, a second-tier Smart Investigator who Helps Their Friends): So there are windows we can see into.

GM: Yes, you see two.

THEO (playing Ivan, a second-tier Fearless Occultist who Would Rather Be Reading): I walk up to the shack.

SUSAN: I cover him with my pistol.

THEO: I'm going to check around the door—search for anything strange or dangerous.

GM: Okay, Theo. That's going to be an Intellect task.

THEO: I'm going to use a level of Effort. I have an Intellect Edge of 1, so it will cost me 2 points from my Pool.

The GM knows there's nothing to find at the doorway, but she muses for half a second as if pretending to figure out a target number.

GM: Roll.

THEO: Rolled a 7.

The group is playing a modified version of "Liquify," the adventure in chapter 16.

GM: You don't find anything out of the ordinary. However, tracks on the ground indicate that someone goes through this doorway on a regular basis.

Dom's character Chris is the best in the group at searching, but any character can try any action, and by using Effort, they'll even be pretty good at it.

THEO: I'm going in. I really think that there's some occult knowledge or something in here. The statement mentioned a creepy old book.

Theo's playing Ivan's descriptor to the hilt.

DOM: Hang on, you don't know what's in there. I go with him.

SUSAN: I'll go too, but I'm keeping my eye out for danger from the outside as well.

GM: The door opens with a creak, and it's quiet and dimly lit inside. The ceiling is already low, and small, delicate pieces of art assembled from animal bones hang from it, so it's tough to move in here without jostling one.

SUSAN: I don't like this at all.

DOM: I keep my eyes peeled.

THEO: I'm looking for books or papers or something. There must be some shelves or an old trunk or something.

GM: Not that you perceive.

DOM: A table? Chairs? A bed?

GM: Not that you perceive.

DOM: This can't be right. The statement made it seem like someone lived here. It mentioned an old man.

THEO: And a book.

The GM says nothing.

DOM: Okay, let's search around. Maybe the floor. Are there loose boards?

GM: You can make an Intellect-based roll. And I know you're trained in perception.

DOM: I ask Ivan to give me a hand.

THEO: I was going to check out these bone things hanging everywhere. They might be part of some kind of occult protection.

DOM: Good call. You do that first before anyone pokes around too much.

SUSAN: Don't touch them if you don't have to.

THEO: I am trained in occultism, of course, and I'm going to use Effort to see if these things ring any bells from my previous studies.

GM: Okay, as you know, that's an Intellect-based task.

THEO: 17! And it's eased by two steps.

The GM anticipated this and had written in her notes that this task has a difficulty of 4. Theo reduces that to 2, so he only needed to roll a 6. He easily succeeds.

GM: Yeah, the objects are delicately assembled and held together with wire and twine. Most of the shapes resemble mystic symbols you're familiar with. Symbols that suggest an eye is watching you.

THEO: This is like an alarm. An early warning system.

SUSAN: Is it an eye watching, or The Eye?

The GM shrugs slightly with her eyebrows raised and a mysterious glint in her eye.

THEO: Could be both.

DOM: The point is, someone probably knows we're here. Do we get out, or search?

THEO: Search!

SUSAN: [sighs] Fine. But I'm ready to shoot the first dangerous thing I see.

Dom goes back to their original idea of searching, and Theo assists. With Chris's skill and Ivan's help, they ease the task by two steps. The difficulty is reduced to 3, and Dom rolls a 9.

GM: You do indeed find some loose floorboards. Lifting them off, there's a hole going down into the cold, dark earth, just big enough for a person to pass through. It smells like wet dirt down there.

DOM: I turn on my flashlight and look down.

GM: Old wooden planks have been hammered into one side of the shaft going down, making a crude ladder. There's a dirt-covered floor at the bottom. Horror Mode has come into play. Intrusions happen on a 1 or a 2 now.

SUSAN: Oh, great. I come take a look, still being careful not to touch any of the bone things. Do the planks look sturdy? How far down does it go?

Susan's also taking her descriptor to heart.

GM: The nails are rusty. The planks are splintered and warped. The depth is maybe three times your own height.

SUSAN: I'll go down first. I guess I'll have to holster my gun. You keep the flashlight pointed down here.

GM: Okay. There's no need to roll for climbing, especially since I assume you're being careful and going slow. However, about halfway down you hear a pained creaking sound, and the plank you're hanging onto pulls from the wall!

The GM stands up when she says this. It's a GM intrusion, so Susan will get 2 XP.

SUSAN: You said it was a tight fit down this shaft. I'll brace myself on the other side.

GM: Sorry, but this happens about halfway down, where the shaft descends into one side of a chamber of some kind.

SUSAN: Crap. Well, I try to grab another plank.

GM: That's a Speed-based task.

SUSAN: Oh fu— [sigh] This is not my day. I roll a 2.

That's a GM intrusion on top of a GM intrusion. Ouch. The GM thought that Audrey would have time to look around before the danger made itself known, but she decides the roll of 2 escalates things. Also, since 2 is in GM intrusione range, Horror Mode heightens, and the intrusion range is now 1–3.

GM: You fall, but not all that far. The impact is jarring but likely nothing more than a bruise. You gain 2 points of Stress. However, while you're still on the ground, cold bony hands grab you by the shoulder and pull you into the chamber, out of the light from Chris's flashlight.

DOM: Something's down there!

GM: Dom and Theo, your characters see this from above, so each of you should make Intellect defense rolls.

They both fail and gain 1 point of Stress each from the shock of these events.

SUSAN: I reduce the Stress I gain by 1, thanks to the ability Scarred and Hardened.

THEO: My ability Seen Some . . . Stuff reduces my Stress from shock by 1 as well. But I'm still really worried about Audrey! I'm going to get down there as fast as I can, even if I get hurt.

GM: That's going to be a Speed-based task. While Theo rolls, Susan, you're on your back in the dark, but whatever grabbed you isn't still holding on. You can see the shaft that you came down, but nothing else down here. What are you going to do?

SUSAN: I draw my gun and wave it around purposefully. Whoever it was doesn't know I can't see them, right?

GM: A voice says, "I knew you were coming." It's gravelly and strained, like it's being pried out of a throat that hasn't spoken aloud in a very long time.

SUSAN: I try to make out where it's coming from and point the pistol in that direction. "Who are you?"

GM: "You put too much faith in that ridiculous weapon." Now it seems like the voice is coming from somewhere else. But before you say anything else, Theo, how's Ivan doing on the climbing rungs?

THEO: I rolled a 10 and I used two levels of Effort.

GM: Susan, you hear a clatter and probably a grunt or two as Ivan climbs down to the chamber. It's really more of a desperate, controlled fall, but he lands on his feet.

DOM: I'm right behind him. Actually, I yell to Ivan that I'm going to drop the flashlight down to him, and then I'll climb. Maybe a bit less dramatically than he did.

GM: Susan, what do you do?

SUSAN: I say, "There's someone down here. We need that light."

THEO: Probably the old man from the statement.

SUSAN: If so, he's a strong old geezer. He manhandled me pretty easily.

GM: Theo, it's going to be a pretty simple Speed-based task to catch the flashlight. I'll just tell you it's difficulty 2.

THEO: I roll a 7. I got it and shine it into the darkness. I'm trying to find Audrey, but also maybe this guy that grabbed her.

GM: Theo and Susan, you see a cramped little cave-like room with a rough dirt floor. It's damp and cold. Near the entrance to a tunnel going off into darkness, you see an old man wearing what looks to be a long grey nightshirt streaked with dirt stains. He's bony—almost skeletal—but somehow gives you the impression that he's more solid and stronger than his frame would suggest. Maybe it's the confidence he exudes. He's clearly not afraid of you in any way, even though Susan's got a gun.

SUSAN: "Who are you, old man? What are you doing down here?"

GM: "Waiting for you."

DOM: Do I reach the bottom?

GM: Yes. You arrive just after he says that.

DOM: I tell him, "We're here looking into the possible murder of a man named Timothy Dunn. We're not the police. Honestly, we're mostly interested in the circumstances of his death."

GM: He listens and seems to size you up, but convincing him to help you is an Intellect-based task. Make a roll.

DOM: I wish Phillip was here. We need our Elocutionist for stuff like this. Anyway, I'll use two levels of Effort. And I roll . . . a 20!

GM: That not only succeeds, but you get the points you spent back too. Plus, you get a major effect.

DOM: Hmm. Maybe there's something he wouldn't normally tell us that he'd be willing to share?

GM: The old man works his jaw as he considers the situation. Finally, he says in a low voice, just above a whisper, "Yeah, I knew Timothy Dunn. And I know how he died too. I'll answer every single question you have, but first, you have to bring me my book."

THEO: Finally! I knew there was a book!

SUSAN: What book?

GM: His voice gets even quieter. "It's called *The Boneturner's Tale*."

CHAPTER 15

ADVENTURE ONE: THE RESURRECTION MOUND

"The Resurrection Mound" is an investigative scenario for beginning characters. It assumes the PCs work for the Magnus Institute (or something very much like it).

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Human remains
- Parasitic infection
- Hornets/wasps
- Animal remains
- Child welfare

SYNOPSIS

The Jeong family discovers strange insects building a nest in their garden. The nest grows very large and displays the ability to somehow resurrect the dead. When Tom Jeong dies, his wife Karen sprinkles his cremated ashes on the nest, restoring him to a semblance of life.

When the PCs arrive, Karen and her young son Nicholas try to cover up Tom's existence. Tom proves to be a fairly mindless horror, but he generally wants to protect his home and family. The paranormal insects want to protect Tom, as well as the other creatures they have resurrected: two squirrels and a cat.

If the PCs reach the nest, they may find the queen is in the process of creating an egg-like sac that would be central to the ritual of The Corruption. Destroying it would be a very good thing.

Investigators might also run afoul of two mysterious, supernatural beings posing as exterminators, Beacon and Howe, who are interested in nurturing the insects and harvesting the corrupt egg sac.

BACKGROUND

A synthesis of two very different fears, the Resurrection Mound and its attendant insects contain aspects of both The Corruption and The End. They exist to return the dead to a state that can only be thought of as a mockery of life.

The mound is under the care of two servants of The Corruption, who call themselves Beacon and Howe and pose as exterminators.

The Jeongs are an extremely average family in the wrong place at the wrong time.

THE STATEMENT OF KAREN JEONG

The following is the statement of Karen Jeong, made at the Magnus Institute following the standard procedures.

Statement begins…

My name is Karen Jeong, and my family and I live out on Stonecrest Lane, on the southern outskirts of town. I'm here to tell you about the thing in my garden.

This adventure could be set anywhere, but as written, it's presumed to be in a large town or city in the UK.

Gardens in the United States are typically called yards or backyards.

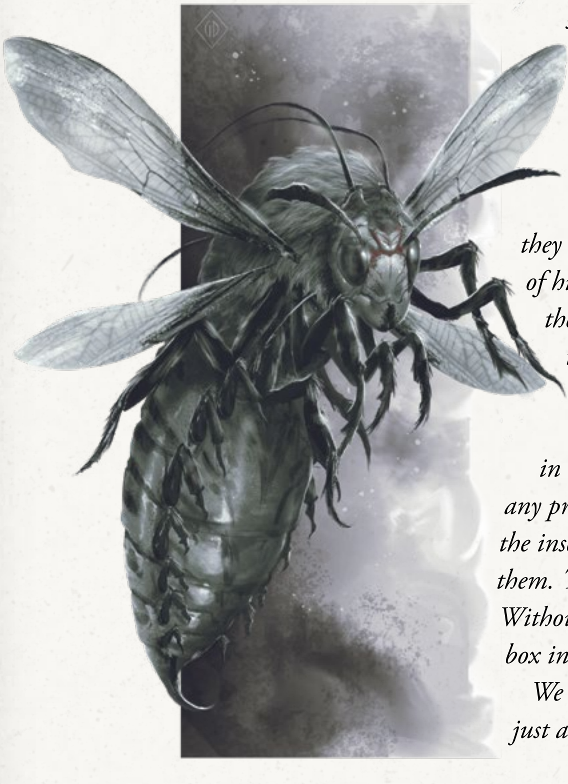
You can find a completed statement form with the following statement at the following link: mymcg.info/tma-files

Beacon and Howe are intentionally meant to evoke Breekon & Hope (see The Deliverymen, page 212).. They are not the same characters but have a similar feel, and the names hopefully creep out knowledgeable players.

About six months ago, we began to notice flying bugs we couldn't identify behind our house. They were red and green and looked like hornets a little bit. They would give you a painful sting if you disturbed them, but otherwise they left us alone. About a week after we first noticed them, we found a nest in the grass toward the back corner of our garden. It was hard and reddish-brown in color, with little holes for the bugs to go in and out. I don't mean to sound dramatic, but it reminded me of the carcinoma my mother developed before she died. It even had the sort of odor that I remember from her deathbed.

My husband Tom decided right then to call an exterminator. He phoned Beacon and Howe Pest Control, but they couldn't come out for almost a week. We told our son Nicholas to keep away from the nest and waited.

The two men they sent out were strange. Huge, slow-moving men in grey uniforms, they went straight into the garden like they knew where they were going. Looking at the nest, which had grown to be almost six inches high with many more of the hornet things buzzing around, one of them asked, "Are you sure you don't want to keep it?"



What a strange question! We said we wanted it and the bugs dealt with and they agreed. The one that spoke (only one of them ever spoke) advised us to go inside. We did, and they went and got some kind of hinged wooden box from their van. Using shovels, they pried the nest up from the ground as a single piece and put it in the box. They didn't wear any protective clothing, but the insects didn't seem to bother them. They were very odd. Without a word, they put the box in the van and drove off.

We went out and there was just a shallow hole where the nest was, and no bugs to be seen. We thought we were done with it, although Tom worried that they hadn't mentioned the charge nor given us an invoice.

About a week later, we started noticing the red and green bugs were back. I checked the spot and the nest was back too. They'd already rebuilt it to the size it had been before. Maybe even a bit larger.

I called Beacon and Howe to tell them the job wasn't finished. The man on the phone said they'd be out again in a week. I told them we wouldn't pay unless they were really taken care of. "You need to guarantee your work if you're going to stay in business," I told him. He just replied "Uh huh" and hung up.

While we waited, we kept an eye on the nest, and every day it grew a little more, looking like a mound or a little tower filled with tiny holes.

Even though I'd tried to keep him away from it, one evening Nicholas noticed small animal bones protruding from it. The nest was almost fifteen or sixteen inches high at this point. The next morning, my husband wanted to take photos to show the exterminators when they returned. When we went out there, though, the bones were gone, and the mound looked disturbed, like something had kicked it. Maybe an animal, we thought, but that was a sure way to get a lot of stings.

The exterminators didn't show up the following week, and my calls just went to a voicemail. The mound stood about two feet high at this point, and Tom took some photos of the very strange moment when we saw that the insects were all swarming in a bundle. It turned out they were swarming over a dead squirrel. Dozens and dozens of them. And they weren't eating it like we thought at first. They were dragging it toward the mound. I almost threw up.

No amount of searching the internet gave us any answers about what kind of bugs these were. I did find a photo of a nest very much like what we had, from out near the Badlands in South Dakota.

That Saturday, Tom said he was going to drive to Beacon and Howe's office to talk to someone directly.

I tried to get an appointment with a different exterminator, but wasn't having any luck. While I tried, Nicholas came into the kitchen.

"Mom, something's weird." He took me outside and we saw a very sick-looking squirrel. Its fur was ragged and it looked emaciated. "I think those bugs have been attacking it," I said. "Do not go out there. Those things are dangerous."

But then as we watched, the squirrel's mouth opened and one of the red and green insects crawled out of it. We both gasped. The bugs were inside it? Was it the same squirrel we'd seen before? But that poor thing had been dead, without a doubt. This one was alive, but not doing well. "It must be a different one," I said under my breath.

Nicholas said quietly, "It's the same one. I was just looking at Dad's pictures."

The phone rang, and I hoped it was one of the exterminators returning my calls.

It wasn't. It was the police.

Tom had been killed in a hit-and-run accident on the way back from Beacon and Howe.

The next week was a blur. Not a week. Nine days. I won't go into all of that. I can't even if I wanted to. I'm sure you can fill in those details yourself. Obviously, Nicholas and I were devastated. Are devastated. I can't even think straight to write this all down.

The only thing I really remember from that week, amid the funeral, the family, and all the arrangements, was a single moment staring out into our garden. The squirrel we'd seen that had looked so bedraggled was running up the tree next to the house and it looked . . . fine. There were some scars in places where its skin was still bare but it scampered about as if nothing was wrong.

I stepped out the back door and looked to the mound. It was at least three feet high now, a crusty tower riddled with dark, finger-sized holes. At the base of it, the bugs were swarming over something again, inching it toward the nest. I think it might have been a dead cat.

I'm going to sprinkle Tom's ashes on the mound tonight.

End of statement.

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

If an investigator uses the Missing Detail ability with regard to the statement, they notice that the actions of the exterminators, Beacon and Howe, seem wildly unprofessional, if not downright bizarre.

Missing Detail, page 29

INITIAL INQUIRIES

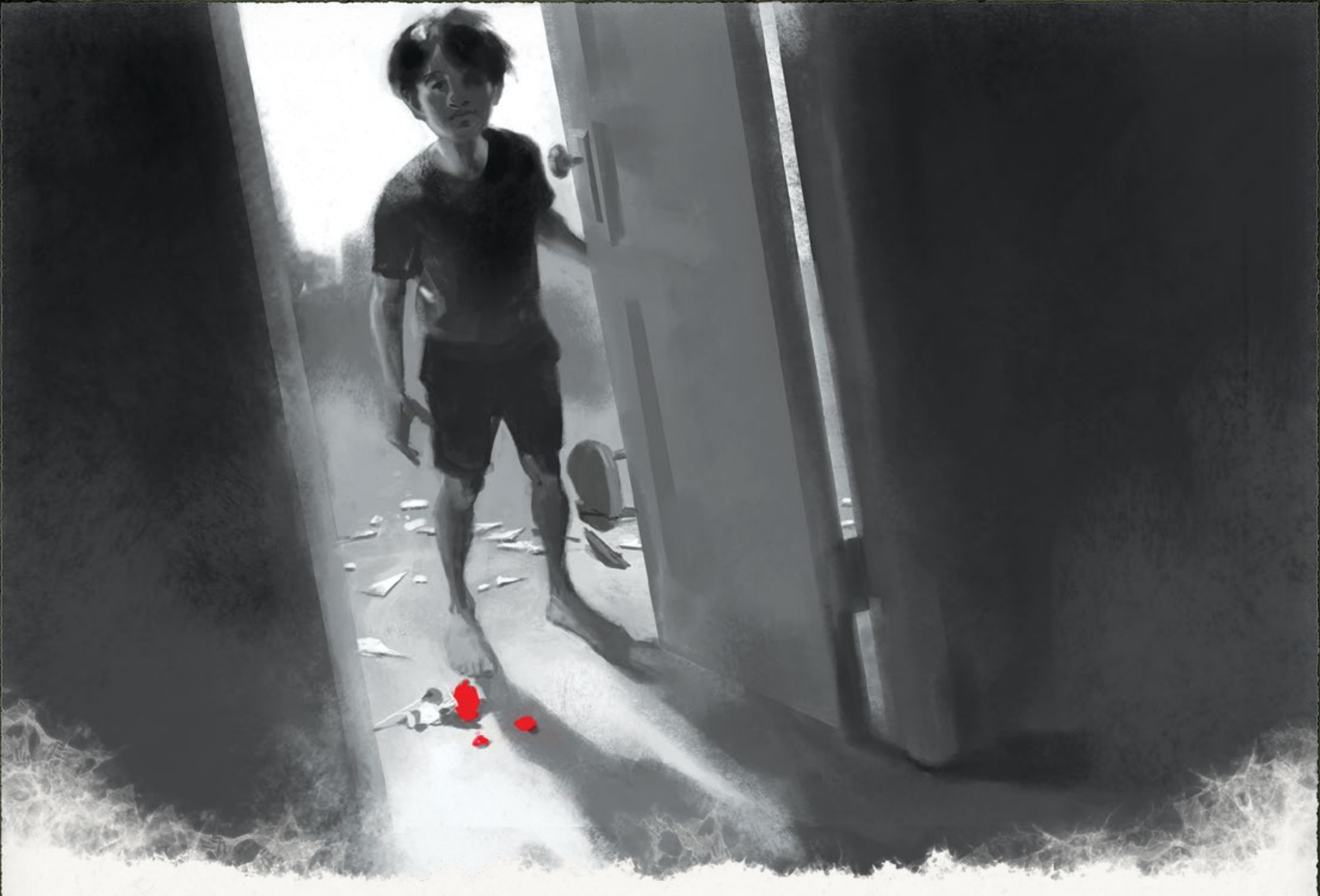
The PCs might do some research about the situation before going personally.

The material here assumes the PCs investigate within a week of receiving the statement.

The Jeongs: No one answers the phone at the Jeong house. Looking into the family (online or using other sources) turns up nothing beyond the fact that they are a normal middle-class family. Second-generation Korean immigrants, Tom works as a data technician and Karen works part time in a party supply store.

The Resurrection Mound: An internet search forsomething fitting the description of the mound shows nothing more than what the statement contained. The archives have nothing on it.

The Exterminators: Beacon and Howe do appear in the archives, but only in passing. Two years ago a man named Leroy Kolb gave a statement about an inordinate amount of flies in his garage, which he felt to be supernatural. He mentioned that he ultimately employed Beacon and Howe to deal with the issue. The statement says that the problem was dealt with in "an unconventional manner" and provides no other information. Following up with Leroy is difficult (he's moved), but persistent investigators can eventually get in touch with him. He's disinclined to talk about it, but if convinced he relates that "Two big guys in uniforms showed up, went in the garage, and came out a few minutes later covered head to toe in flies. They got in their van like that and left. Never heard from them again, but the fly problem was taken care of." He never got a bill and he's worried that he might.



THE JEONG HOUSE

Nicholas: *level 1*

On the outskirts of a small town near a much larger city (whichever city is appropriate) sits the home of Tom and Karen Jeong, as well as their son Nicholas. It's on a road that is quiet and far from traffic. Trees are prevalent, and the nearest neighbor is probably a quarter mile away.

The house is fairly large and quintessentially middle American. There's a minivan parked in the driveway and a kid's bike lying on the lawn. A detached garage is on the other side of the driveway.

Karen: *level 2; resisting lies, trickery, or intimidation as level 3*

Curtains are drawn in every window of the house.

If the PCs go to the front door, Nicholas answers.

NICHOLAS

Nicholas is about ten years old. His straight black hair is disheveled and his clothes look like he's slept in them.

- He has no idea who or what the Magnus Institute is.
- If asked, he says that his mom can't come to the door. He can be convinced to call for her, but doing so is a difficulty 3 task.
- He refuses to let anyone in (although should anyone want to force their way past, it wouldn't be hard).

KAREN

Like Nicholas, Karen looks like she hasn't slept much, and when she did it was in the clothes she's wearing.

- She tries to get the PCs to leave—kindly at first, sternly if she must. She says that she doesn't have time to talk, it's not a good time, she's sorry she bothered the Institute with her story, and everything is fine. Convincing her to let them in is a difficulty 5 task.

- She tries to dismiss her statement, saying that she was just distraught with grief and wasn't thinking straight. Everything is fine.
- If nothing else works, she tries to slam the door in the PCs' faces.
- If the PCs manage to get inside, Karen continues to try to cover up what's been happening, but strange noises (Tom moving around and making weird moans) eventually cause her to break down, at which point Tom shuffles in.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

Entering the house activates Horror Mode. If an investigator uses the Careful Observation ability in the house, it is clear right away that Karen and Nicholas are doing their best to deal with a chaotic situation and have been for a while. The situation is around the clock, but other than sleep deprivation, neither of them is in any immediate physical danger.

The house is in disarray and there's an odd, sour smell in the air. Tom's presence is disruptive, and his object handling skills are poor, so furnishings and decor have been dropped, broken, or toppled, and there hasn't been much time to clean or put things right.

Kitchen: Dirty dishes pile on the table and in the sink. Broken dishes cover the floor. Open to the dining room.

Dining room: A few chairs are knocked over. Some of the red and green insects crawl or fly about. Sliding glass doors here lead onto the back deck.

Living room: In shambles. A few of the insects crawl or fly about. The front door is here.

Tom and Karen's bedroom: This is where Karen tries to keep Tom. She closes the door if strangers come over. Many of the insects crawl or fly about.

Nicholas's bedroom (upstairs): Compared to the rest of the house, this room is in good shape. Karen tries (and fails) to keep her son here and away from Tom.

Guest room (upstairs): This is where Karen tries (and fails) to sleep.

Extra room: While he was alive, Tom used this as a home office. There's also a large collection of LEGO brick building sets that he and Nicholas enjoyed working on together, and a small craft table for Karen's jewelry-making hobby.

Attic: Empty.

Basement: Used for storage. It's also where they keep the furnace, washer, and dryer.

TOM

Shuddering with tremors, a vaguely human-shaped mass of ash, bone, and swarming insects moves slowly, leaving a fine bit of ash behind him. Just seeing Tom shamble in gives any PC 2 points of Stress immediately. If they realize that this is Tom, the husband who was dead, they must succeed at an Intellect defense roll (difficulty 4) or gain 2 additional points of Stress.

Tom has only vague memories from his life—mostly just emotional connections. He loves and wants to protect his family. Other people are a threat and very likely warrant violence.

Tom's new body is mostly an empty shell with many thin layers, with the consistency of a paper wasp nest. Damage to it is almost entirely superficial, but it always results in a new swarm of insects emerging to attack. Fire is very effective in destroying him, but it burns so fast and hot that it's likely to ignite anything flammable nearby.

INTERACTING WITH THE JEONGS

Once Tom makes an appearance, Karen can be convinced (difficulty 4) to calm him and get him (and the insects) to stop attacking. Otherwise he attacks.

- If the PCs damage Tom, Karen screams for everyone to stop.
- If the PCs damage Tom, Nicholas tries to help his father against the "bad people." While he's not really a threat, this may put him in danger.
- At no point do Tom or the insects intentionally harm Karen or Nicholas.

GM intrusion: *Karen attempts to slam the door, and one of the characters might get hit by it if they fail a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll. If the PC is struck, Karen feels bad about hurting them, and the PC might be able to use that to ease a persuasion attempt—or hinder one if they react poorly.*

If Horror Mode is already active and the PCs encounter a situation that would activate it again, Horror Mode heightens.

Horror Mode, page 122

Careful Observation, page 29

Tom: *level 3, Speed defense and anything requiring intelligence as level 1; inflicts 3 Stress per attack; physical attacks against him inflict only 1 damage, and attacking him results in a swarm of insects retaliating*

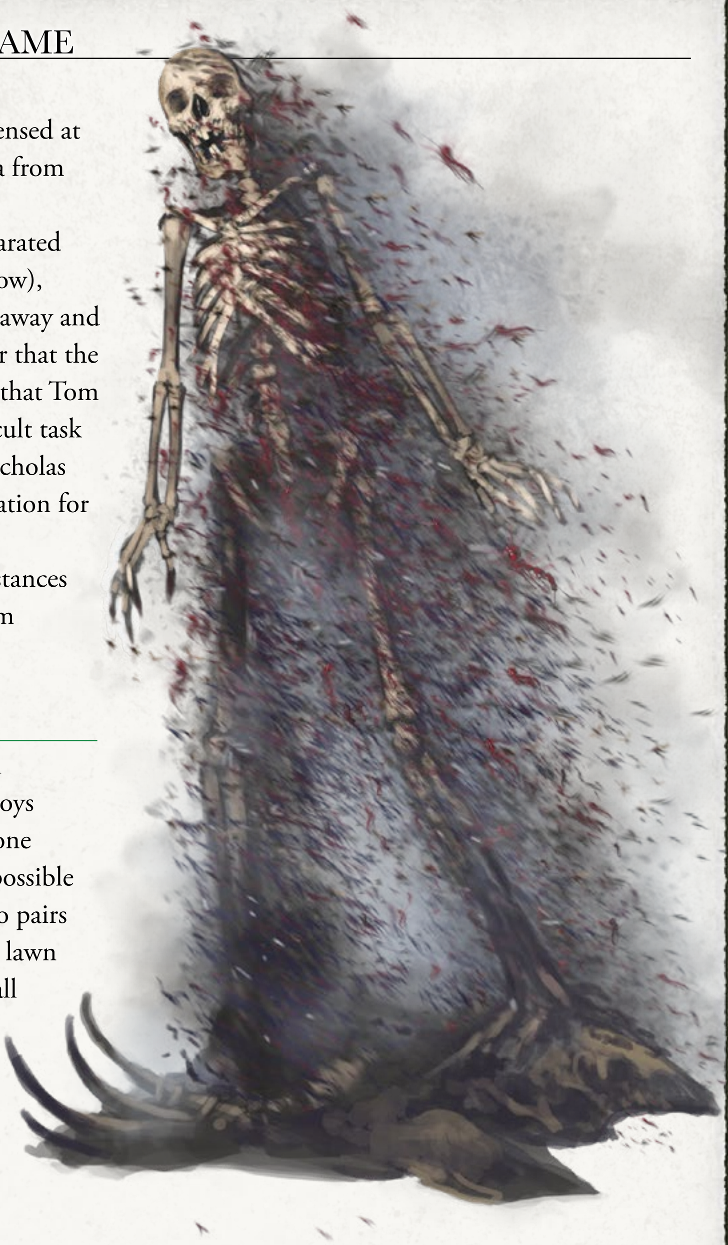
Insect: *level 1, Speed defense as level 3; inflicts 2 Stress per attack; swarm can attack as a single level 3 creature*

GM intrusion: *If a fight with Tom ensues, a character is knocked backward into a display cabinet. It falls over and threatens to land on Nicholas. If a PC wants to try to save him, they must succeed at a Speed-based task (difficulty 3) or the boy is hurt and trapped under the fallen cabinet.*

- If Tom is destroyed, Karen is incensed at first, then collapses into catatonia from the stress.
- If Tom and his family can be separated (such as by trapping Tom somehow), Karen pleads with the PCs to go away and leave them alone. Convincing her that the thing isn't really her husband, or that Tom must be destroyed, is a very difficult task (level 6). Convincing her that Nicholas should be removed from the situation for his safety is easier (level 4).
- If the PCs flee, under no circumstances will Karen or Nicholas allow them back in.

GARAGE

The detached two-car garage holds an older, small car and various outdoor toys for Nicholas. Tools and other things one would expect are found here, but of possible interest to the PCs, the garage has two pairs of tough gardening gloves, some long lawn tools, a small butane torch, and a small chainsaw. A cabinet holds a can of wasp spray and poison for killing ants and other crawling pests.



THE GARDEN

Going into the garden activates Horror Mode, or heightens it if it is already in effect.

The area teems with insects bombinating loudly. The one-acre lot holds a few trees, an ill-tended raised vegetable garden, and a steel and plastic swing set. A wooden deck extends from the back of the house with a sliding set of glass doors.

Careful Observation, page 29

If an investigator uses the Careful Observation ability in the garden, they notice a number of used cans of common insecticide tossed under the deck, perhaps suggesting that using such things didn't help the Jeongs.

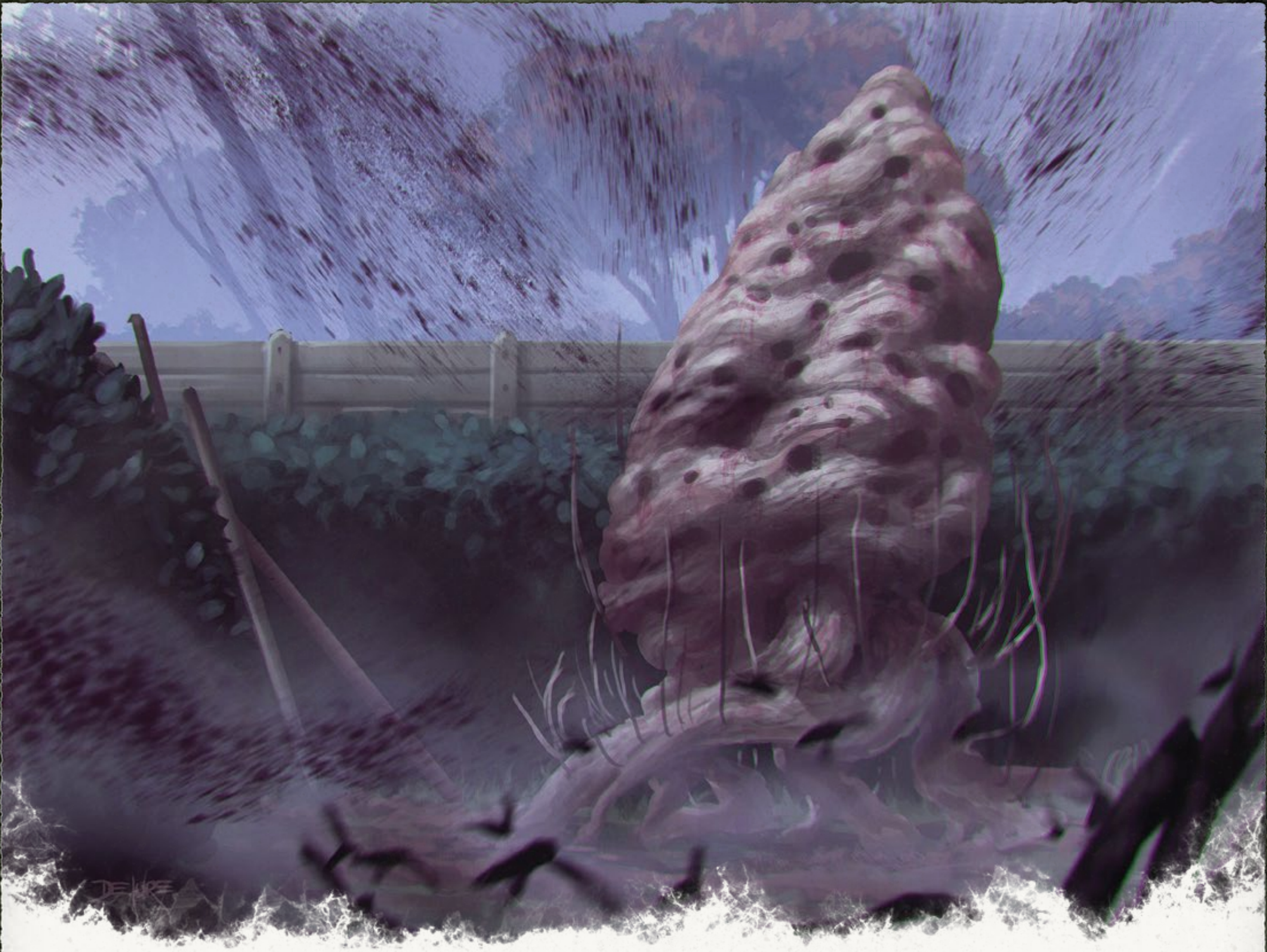
Breaking into the mound is a Might-based task with a difficulty of 3. Destroying the nest requires an action to break into it, then two further Might-based actions with a difficulty of 4 over the course of at least a half hour of work.

THE MOUND

In the rear of the lot, next to a row of hedges, stands the Resurrection Mound. Almost 6 feet (2 m) tall, the reddish-brown, cylindrical nest is 14 inches (36 cm) across at the base, and its entire structure is riddled with tiny holes about a half inch (1 cm) wide.

Insects crawl across its surface, fly around it at all heights, and squeeze in and out of the holes. The nest almost vibrates with the actions of all the bugs, and the droning buzz from within is loud enough that a person next to it would have to shout to be heard. It smells like rotting meat with a sickly sweet undertone.

The outside is hard, an inch (3 cm) thick, and quite fibrous.



THE INSECTS

The insects have hornet-like wings and heads, but their 2-inch (5 cm) long bodies are brilliant red with bits of green and have far more than six quivering legs of different lengths. One might be forgiven for thinking they look like brightly colored house centipedes with wings.

Supernatural in origin, the insects are not necessarily smarter or tougher than they appear, but they do act in concert, and as such they have a common goal.

The insects defend their nest. If it is threatened, a swarm (level 3) of insects attacks each person near it. This continues until all the insects are dead or the PCs leave the garden.

THE RESURRECTED ANIMALS

Three creatures brought back by the mound (two squirrels and a cat) now maintain a presence in the garden and the surrounding area. PCs spending a lot of time there will be attacked by one of them, and a direct threat to the nest brings them all in.

An attack by one of these resurrected animals may seem like a natural, albeit surprising event, perhaps brought on by rabies or something similar. As soon as a creature suffers damage, however, one or more of the animating insects comes out of the wound or the mouth (or both), making it clear that something paranormal is occurring. Characters seeing this gain 2 points of Stress unless they succeed at a difficulty 3 Intellect defense roll.

Insect: *level 1, Speed defense as level 3; inflicts 2 Stress per attack; swarm can attack as a single level 3 creature*

Resurrected animal: *level 2, Speed defense as level 4; injury causes one or two insects to emerge, which also attack; the realization that it is dead causes 1 Stress*

GM intrusion: *If a fight with the insects ensues, bugs fly into and under a character's clothing. Until they are removed (a Speed-based task with a difficulty of 4), the character gains 1 Stress each round on top of Stress from the regular attacks of the swarm.*

GM intrusion: *The character sees one of the resurrected animals in a tree, watching them. As they stare at it, a red and green insect squirms out of its mouth. The shock of seeing this gives the character 2 Stress. Interacting with the animal causes it to attack.*

USEFUL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

PCs who plan ahead (or retreat and gear up) may find the following tools and strategies useful.

Professional Insecticide: A powerful, professional-grade insecticide (not something that can be purchased at, say, a hardware shop), such as one with pyrethrins and pyrethroids, is very effective at paralyzing and killing the insects quickly and in great numbers. One action taken with these chemicals using a sprayer will take care of an entire swarm. You need a professional license to obtain the chemicals legally, and they are exceedingly toxic. Directly spraying a character inflicts a serious injury, and even a small amount of skin contact gives 2 points of Stress.

Home-Use Insecticide: Bought at a hardware shop, these sprays are easier to obtain and use, but less effective. Two character actions with an effective sprayer will kill a swarm. Directly spraying a character gives them 3 points of Stress, and skin contact gives 1 point of Stress.

Beekeeping Suit: A character wearing a high-quality (multilayer) bee suit cannot be stung by these insects.

Smoke: Smoke will not kill these insects, but it does deter them temporarily. It can create a barrier that works for one or two rounds, after which they just fly around it.

NOT-SO-USEFUL TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

These are good ideas that just don't apply to the situation. It's likely PCs won't discover their ineffectiveness unless they try these methods.

Darkness: While it's smart to deal with a wasp or hornet nest after dark when they are less active, these insects are active around the clock.

Fire: The nest will burn, but it will burn with such an intensity that it will almost certainly spread to the nearby hedges, trees, and grass. Plus, the fire will not kill the insects, only drive them out of the nest, enraged.

Plastic Bags: Some people like to cover a hive or nest with a plastic bag to trap the insects inside. Even if the PCs had a bag big enough to cover the mound, these insects will likely tear right through it.

Homemade Remedies: Concoctions that work against wasps, yellowjackets, or hornets—like spraying petrol/gasoline, apple cider vinegar, citrus, dish soap, and so on—have no effect on these bugs. And some of these (like petrol/gasoline) may be very dangerous and prime opportunities for GM intrusions.

THE QUEEN AND THE EGG SAC

The queen: *level 4, Speed defense as level 1; attacks psychically by infusing a nearby target with terror and dark thoughts of insects and crawling things, giving 3 Stress*

The Corruption, page 170

At the heart of the mound's interior lies the queen. She is wingless, bloated, and almost 12 inches (30 cm) long. If found, she's coiled around a bulbous, pale yellow mass that looks a bit like a moist, glutinous tumor the size of a large apple. This is the corrupt egg sac.

In the process of building the Resurrection Mound, the insects kill nearby creatures and then use the power of the mound to bring them back to a semblance of life. Doing so adds power to the mound and hastens the creation of the corrupt egg sac.

The corrupt egg sac is an artefact of the dread power of The Corruption. All that follow that Entity seek and covet it.

ARTEFACT: THE CORRUPT EGG SAC

Level: 4
Related Entity: The Corruption
Stress: 2 when closely examined; 3 when used
Description: This moist, pale yellow mass is the size of a large man's clenched fist and smells sour. When it is held aloft, nearby insects obey the user's spoken commands to the best of their ability. It is also the key component to a ritual that creates a doorway into The Corruption, which brings the Entity into the world and is very likely cause for a great deal of sickness and despair if completed.
Fear: The corruptive power of the egg sac inflicts a serious injury on the possessor every 24 hours if they fail a Might defense roll until they no longer possess it (the damage cycle begins again if they reclaim it).

BEACON AND HOWE

Enterprising investigators may go to the office of Beacon and Howe Pest Control.

OFFICE FRONT

The building location immediately raises suspicions. The office is in a retail park (or strip mall) in a dodgy part of town. The parking lot and area out front are filthy and filled with trash. The electric sign is out, but during the day there's a sign on the door that says "OPEN."

Inside, it smells of acrid chemicals and dust. There's a single shelf on one side of the small room that holds a variety of pest control products, almost as if they are for sale (they are not). An empty counter stands before a closed and locked door that leads to the back office. There's literally nothing else there—no bell to ring, no signage, nothing.

Perhaps strangest of all, examining the room (difficulty 2) reveals signs of bugs—a few ants along the baseboards and a cobweb or two in the corners.

This isn't what an exterminator's office should look like. Rather, it's what someone utterly clueless might think it should look like. A real pest control business would have informative literature, someone to take appointments and explain services offered, chairs for clients, and so on.

THE DOOR

The door to the back office is locked (difficulty 4). However, if anyone in the front office calls out, knocks, or tries to open the door, Beacon comes out, standing in—and blocking—the doorway.

Beacon is more than 6.5 feet (2 m) tall, sports broad shoulders, and has a bit of a stooped, shoulders-forward posture, as if he just barely supports his own frame. He is balding and has a flat face. He wears grey coveralls with the name "Beacon" on the breast.

If asked a question, his response is little more than "Uh huh" or "Nah," or perhaps a shrug. He's not interested in helping customers. He just wants people to leave. If he engages with visitors for more than a few minutes, Howe steps barely into view behind him. He's not Beacon's twin, but they look very, very similar. Eventually, if pestered, they say, "Closing time" (regardless of the time of day) and try to force visitors to leave.

BACK OFFICE

There is a door into here from the front office and another from the back alley behind the strip mall. Both Beacon and Howe carry keys to these doors and to their van, which is always parked by the back door when they are here.

The back office is where Beacon and Howe are found when not out and about. It is anything but an office, however. Entering (or attempting to enter) is likely to provoke a violent response from them, but if seriously challenged or the authorities are involved, they flee in the van. If they get into a fight, they use their fists at first (3 points of Stress), but once they are injured, they arm themselves with lead pipes or hand tools and inflict serious injuries.

Beacon and Howe: *level 5, all actions when they are close to each other as level 6; health 30; inflicts 3 Stress per attack if unarmed or a serious injury if armed; ignores any damage from insects, poison, acid, or anything slimy, disgusting, or similar*

Should the PCs manage to get into the back room, they find it full of strange junk. Grime and filth cover most everything, and roaches and flies are common. The junk includes:

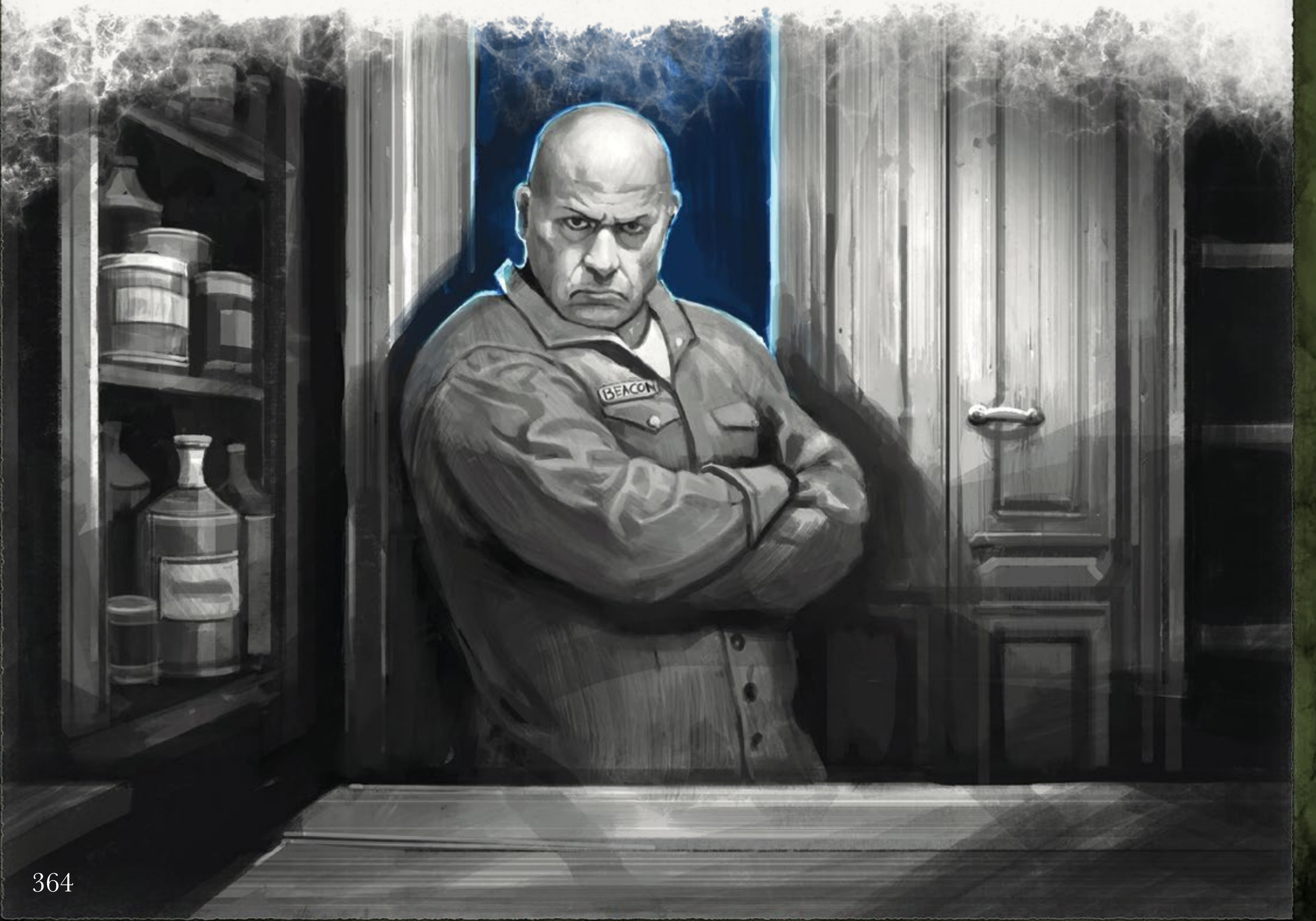
- Unmarked canisters of poisonous chemicals.
- Nets of various sizes and types.
- A variety of tools, including many that would seem to have nothing to do with pest control. These are haphazardly spread around the room.
- About two dozen bottles of cheap beer, a dozen or so cans of meat, and various biscuits/snack cakes and crisps in plastic packaging.
- Miscellaneous refuse, including paint cans, lumber, lengths of lead pipe, broken kitchen appliances, and empty food containers.

The room has a dirty sink, a wooden cupboard (empty), and a built-in countertop on one wall that holds some of the junk as well as a book bearing the name *The Queen and the Egg Sac*.

THE TRUTH BEHIND BEACON AND HOWE

Beacon and Howe are in fact inhuman beings that serve The Corruption. They use the cover of exterminators to find and capture various unnatural types of insects, worms, and similar creatures, hoping to nurture them in service of their master. Both beings are mostly free of emotion and can't be intimidated, shamed, or embarrassed. They have fondness for insects and other creatures in their purview, and these emotions do bubble to the surface now and again.

If attacked, they defend themselves, and if they have to use force to reach a particular



BOOK: THE QUEEN AND THE EGG SAC

Level: 3

Related Entity: The Corruption

Stress: 1 upon perusal; 2 with each use

Description: This magical book is thin, softcover, and saddle-stitched. Most of its contents are complex chemical formulas and diagrams (which make little sense to anyone with chemistry knowledge, but a bit more to anyone with occult knowledge). It includes the process for farming and harvesting a corrupt egg sac within the Resurrection Mound without harm (and without harming the egg sac).

Fear: The reader must succeed at an Intellect defense roll once each day (at a very inopportune time) for the next week. A failure means they are convinced that they are covered in crawling, biting insects and gain 3 points of Stress. This might be true, or it might be their imagination. The Stress is the same.

goal, they will, but they prefer to avoid combat, probably by simply walking away. It's quite likely that they cannot be permanently killed by any conventional means, and that "death" is merely an inconvenience they can overcome in a few weeks.

BEACON AND HOWE AT LARGE

In addition to finding Beacon and Howe at the office, the PCs might witness them observing the Jeong house—or rather, the Resurrection Mound—from a distance. They have their company van with them, although they might park where it can't be seen from the house. The van, if investigated, is rather mundane (albeit filthy and smelly) and mostly empty, with the exception of a few shovels and a wheelbarrow.

Beacon and Howe intervene should anyone attempt to significantly harm the mound or harvest the corrupt egg sac. This intervention might come in the form of an offer to help remove the mound, which they then load into their van. However, they resort to defending the nest with force if they must.

OTHER PC RESOURCES

The PCs might call the police or children's services (child welfare department) and file a report. If the PCs haven't been inside the house, neither option gets immediate results, as the characters haven't really seen anything. If they have been inside and seen the state of things (and perhaps even Tom), they can make a far more significant report that brings the authorities in fairly quickly. However, a few unprepared officers will be no match for Tom, the insects, and the other horrors involved, and the situation won't be resolved until more people are injured or killed, backup is called in, and the whole incident makes the news (reported as a botched police raid of a clandestine drug factory/meth lab or something similar).

GM intrusion (group): *Either via an accident in a fight with Beacon and Howe in the back office, or through intentional action by the pair to cover their escape, one or more canisters of chemicals in the room are damaged, spraying noxious fumes and toxic liquids everywhere. Everyone who does not flee must succeed at a Might defense roll each round for the next three rounds or gain 3 Stress, and even those succeeding gain 1 Stress. Beacon and Howe suffer no ill effects.*

CONCLUDING THE INVESTIGATION

There isn't much potential for a happy ending here, but that's likely something PCs (and players) will have to get accustomed to when working for the Magnus Institute. Remember that the players decide when the investigation is over. Their mission is to find out as much as possible about the situation and confirm the facts in the statement. In other words, they could talk to Karen through the door and never go in, poke around the garden, and call it done. That's not a very satisfying job performance as far as the Institute is concerned (because they didn't confirm what happened to Tom, ascertain the status of the rest of the family, or learn much about the mound beyond confirming its existence).

Characters who do learn that information gain 2 XP each. Destroying the corrupt egg sac is worth an additional 2 XP each.

And of course character arcs may come into play as well.

CHAPTER 16

ADVENTURE TWO: LIQUIFY

“Liquify” is an investigative scenario suitable for beginning characters, but it might be better if they had some experience. It assumes the PCs work for the Magnus Institute (or something very much like it). The adventure makes use of the book from the podcast called *The Boneturner’s Tale* but gives it a different background and context.

The Boneturner’s Tale, *page 268*

CONTENT WARNINGS

- Human remains
- Extreme gore
- Body horror

SYNOPSIS

“Liquify” takes the characters out into the remote countryside to look into the apparent murder of a young man named Timothy Dunn.

In the course of their investigation, they discover that a strange old man was trying to get into his house, looking for an old book owned by Dunn’s father. Timothy is dead inside the house, clearly murdered by supernatural forces. Clues in the house might reveal the location of the book in question, *The Boneturner’s Tale*. It lies in Timothy’s father’s grave on a nearby hill.

The old man, a would-be sorcerer calling himself “Osteros,” lives in a nearby shack a few miles from a river—or rather, in some chambers beneath the shack. The PCs may follow the trail to the shack, but Osteros is not Dunn’s killer. The killer is an Avatar of The Flesh known as The Sculptor. If the PCs are smart and lucky, they won’t share the young man’s fate.

BACKGROUND

Everyone believed Harold Dunn to be a simple farmer. He was married and had a family, raising dairy cows and chickens out in the middle of nowhere. Unknown to everyone other than his wife, he was also a student of the occult and came into possession of a magical book called *The Boneturner’s Tale*. He never used the foul book, but rather kept it safe from two of its former owners, a being now known as The Sculptor and a man named Zachary Easton. The book was stolen from Easton by Harold’s cousin, who simply thought it seemed valuable. The Sculptor caught up with the thief, but not before he put it in the safekeeping of his young cousin Harold. Harold learned of its nature and realized that it must be hidden away forever or destroyed, and he spent his life studying how to do that (and sadly failed). He did manage to place a powerful protective ward around his house, which kept the book safe for years. Fearing the ward would fail after his death, Harold had the book secretly buried with him on a hill overlooking his farm.

The Sculptor serves as an Avatar of The Flesh. Presumably once a woman, this horrific being appears to be more of an inhuman creature, with the ability to reshape the flesh of any living thing she touches. She wants *The Boneturner's Tale* found so its dark power and knowledge can be spread once again across the Earth.

Enter the self-proclaimed "sorcerer," Zachary Easton, who refers to himself as "Osteros" and claims to be immortal. *The Boneturner's Tale* was once in his possession, but it was stolen from him and he's searched for it ever since. He long ago tracked it to Dunn's farmhouse. The fact that there's a ward keeping him out only makes him more certain it lies inside. He has no idea it's been moved.

His years of attempts to get inside the Dunn house to get the book have drawn the attention of The Sculptor, but the two are not allies. Osteros's main goal in getting the book comes from the fact that it will keep him safe from her (allowing him to undo anything she might do to him). The Sculptor can sense the book, but her methods are slow and methodical. Eventually she will find it in Harold's grave.

THE STATEMENT OF TIMOTHY DUNN

The following is the statement of Timothy Dunn, taken from a text file apparently created using dictation software on his smartphone. The Magnus Institute received it as an attachment to an email.

Statement begins…

My name is Timothy Dunn, and I'm dead. Not like "Oh man, my wife is going to kill me," but like really dead.

Here's the thing. I don't know who killed me, or how. Knowing that won't save me. Nothing will. So why am I recording this? Justice? No, I don't think so.

I just don't want to be some notation on some record in a file cabinet somewhere. A John Doe no one remembers. Someone should understand what happened to me. That's why I'm sending this to you people and not the police. Because they'll just assume I'm crazy and throw it all away. But you people know about this kind of thing.

I'm using the voice dictation thing on my phone to record this while I lie here. Before I'm gone. But there's no way you'll read this before I . . . die. That's why I'm saying this all like I'm already dead. Because as far as you're concerned, I am.

All right then. I've been living out in Hammond County, on a farm that my family's held onto since my grandfather. You won't find my body, though. I don't think there will be anything left. I think that's how it works.

I'm not a farmer. I didn't really spend much time here before a few weeks ago. The place had been boarded up and empty for I don't know how many years. But I was homeless—out of cash and out of options—so I hitched out here. I had to break a window to get in, but I do honestly own the place, so that's no crime. There's no one else in my family left to claim it.

There's no electricity, but there's water. About half the rooms were bare of furniture, but there was a little. I made the best of things I could. At least it was a roof over my head. I wasn't here more than a week, though, before I started hearing noises outside. The house is way out here, so I figured it was just raccoons or something. Then one night I caught a glimpse of a person outside the house. There's a shed here, and they were rummaging through it.

The first thing that came to my mind when I saw this was that it was dark out there. No electricity, remember? But this person didn't have any light with them, and they seemed to have no problem rooting through all the junk with only the stars providing any light.

Obviously, I didn't get a good look at them. Couldn't tell you if they were big, small, male, female—anything. Just a person shape. Anyway, I was scared. I stayed quiet and hid in the house.

You can find a completed statement form with the following statement at the following link: mymcg.info/tma-files

Eventually, they were gone. A few hours passed, then finally I got to sleep. The next day, I cleaned the mess they'd made and tried to close up the old shed, but the door wouldn't latch anymore. I didn't much care. While I worked at that, I felt like someone was watching me, but I couldn't see anyone.

That night, though, I kept a nervous eye out. Sure enough, I saw someone in the yard again. I'm not embarrassed to say that I'd already pushed an old bureau against the front door and a heavy table against the back door in case they came back. When I heard the banging noise, I knew it was someone trying to force the front door.

I wanted to get a look at them, so I crept into the front room and peered out the window. It was an old man. Didn't look very frightening. Instead, he looked withered. Frail. So I yell out, "Get out of here, old man. This is my house. I've got a baseball bat, and I'm calling the cops."

He came to the window and peered in. "The book," he croaked out. "Give me the book."

"Go to hell, I don't have your book."

He left.

I had no idea what he was talking about—I just had to hope he wouldn't come back.

But he did. The next night. He just banged on the door and said, very quietly, "Give me the book." And he did that for at least an hour, ignoring me when I yelled at him to get lost.

For a minute, I thought there were two figures out there in the night, but my mind was playing tricks.

Finally, the old codger left again. I didn't sleep that night. But after lying in the only bed still in the house, I got up and in the light of my flashlight I gathered up every single book I could find. A couple of old kids' books, a bible, a book in German holding up a broken leg of the couch. I even found some old Life *magazines from who knows how long ago. I would have looked in the cellar, but I knew it was way too damp down there to keep any books. And if I'm being honest, I didn't really want to go down there in the middle of the night anyway. By morning's light, I piled them all up on the front stoop. Maybe he wouldn't come back. But if he did, maybe one of these books would satisfy him.*

He did, and they didn't. He kicked those books into the weeds by the door and repeated his whispered demand. I holed up in the pantry off the kitchen because it had no exterior walls, blocked the door with a chair, and got some sleep.

The next day, I went outside. I didn't have a baseball bat, but I did have an old length of pipe I found in the shed. I figured I needed to confront him or I'd never get any real rest. Maybe he just needed to be scared. I searched all over the property. He had to be nearby, I figured. And if I was going to get physical with him, I wanted it to be in the light of day.

I searched all that day, and by evening I reached the river about two miles from the farm. Once again, from time to time I felt like someone was watching me, but I caught no sight of him and I doubted anyone else was way out here.

There was an old wooden shack on the river bank, though, amid some trees. It looked abandoned, but I wanted to check it out. I thought I saw movement inside and made to call out a warning. Probably something like, "Hey old man, I'm coming for you." You'd think after having all day to think of it, I'd have come up with something better.

Anyway, it doesn't matter, because I never got a chance to say anything. Just as I saw—I'm pretty sure I saw, anyway—the old man's face in the window of the shack, I felt a slicing pain in my back. So much pain. I don't know if you've experienced that kind of thing, but it hurt so bad, and took so much out of me that I didn't even have the energy to cry out. It felt—well, it felt like someone behind me was reaching into my body and grabbing things. Moving them. Rearranging them. I blacked out.

When I came to, I was back in the farmhouse, in the bed I'd been using. The pain returned every time I so much as moved, but I could only barely manage moving my arm. Otherwise, I was just sort of stuck. I didn't know how I got there, but it sure wasn't under my own power. The bed was soaked with blood. I called out, but there was no one. I screamed my fool head off, but no one came.

I think I passed out again, and when I woke up next the bed was so soaked that it sort of . . . sloshed. It wasn't just blood. The pain was a lot less, and I mostly just felt numb, like the nerves in my back had stopped working. I pulled my arm around and felt under me—I don't know why—and came away with not just blood but something I wish I'd never seen. It was a pink and red sort of goop. I was liquifying.

So now you get it. You see? I'm dead. Even now, I can't move anything but my mouth. And even as I say that, my throat is clogged with, well, my throat. My teeth are coming loose. The back of my arms and legs stick to the bed. I'm not going to tell you about the smell.

Please, if you can, figure out [cough] what this is and know that I'm not just some nameless—damn. There [cough] goes [cough] a tooth. I didn't just disappear [cough]—well, maybe I did [cough]. Or will [cough]. Whatever [cough]. Somebody's got to know my story [cough] [cough].

End of statement.

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

If an investigator uses the Missing Detail ability with regard to the statement, they notice that the details in the statement suggest that perhaps the old man trying to get into the house wasn't actually a threat to Dunn, but that there is another person involved who was. Finding and talking to the mysterious old man might be a crucial step in learning the truth of what's really going on.

INITIAL INQUIRIES

The PCs might do some research about the situation before going personally.

The Dunn Property: It's not too hard to find in courthouse records or even online that there is a 25-acre property out in a particularly rural area of Hammond County registered to a Harold Dunn. Harold Dunn passed away fifteen years ago. His son, Nathan, inherited the property but did not occupy it. Nathan passed away eight years ago.

The nearest neighbor is almost 2 miles (3 km) away down an old country road, but if questioned, they'll confirm that the Dunn farm has been vacant for years. Of Harold Dunn, they only know that he was a kind, quiet man who died on the farm of natural causes. Of Nathan or Timothy Dunn, they know nothing.

Timothy Dunn: A high-school dropout, Timothy has a criminal record for crimes like petty theft, trespassing, narcotics possession, and vagrancy, but all such convictions are six years old or more. His current whereabouts are unknown.

THE FARMHOUSE

The driveway is long and unpaved. Large trees scatter across the landscape subdivided by seemingly random fences, most no longer maintained. A rusted, wheel-less old truck rots in the yard as characters approach the old two-story farmhouse, white paint peeling and roof slightly sagging. A concrete stoop leads to a simple front door. An old shed, boards grey with age, stands sturdy against the oppression of time and neglect.

Missing Detail, page 29

THE SHED

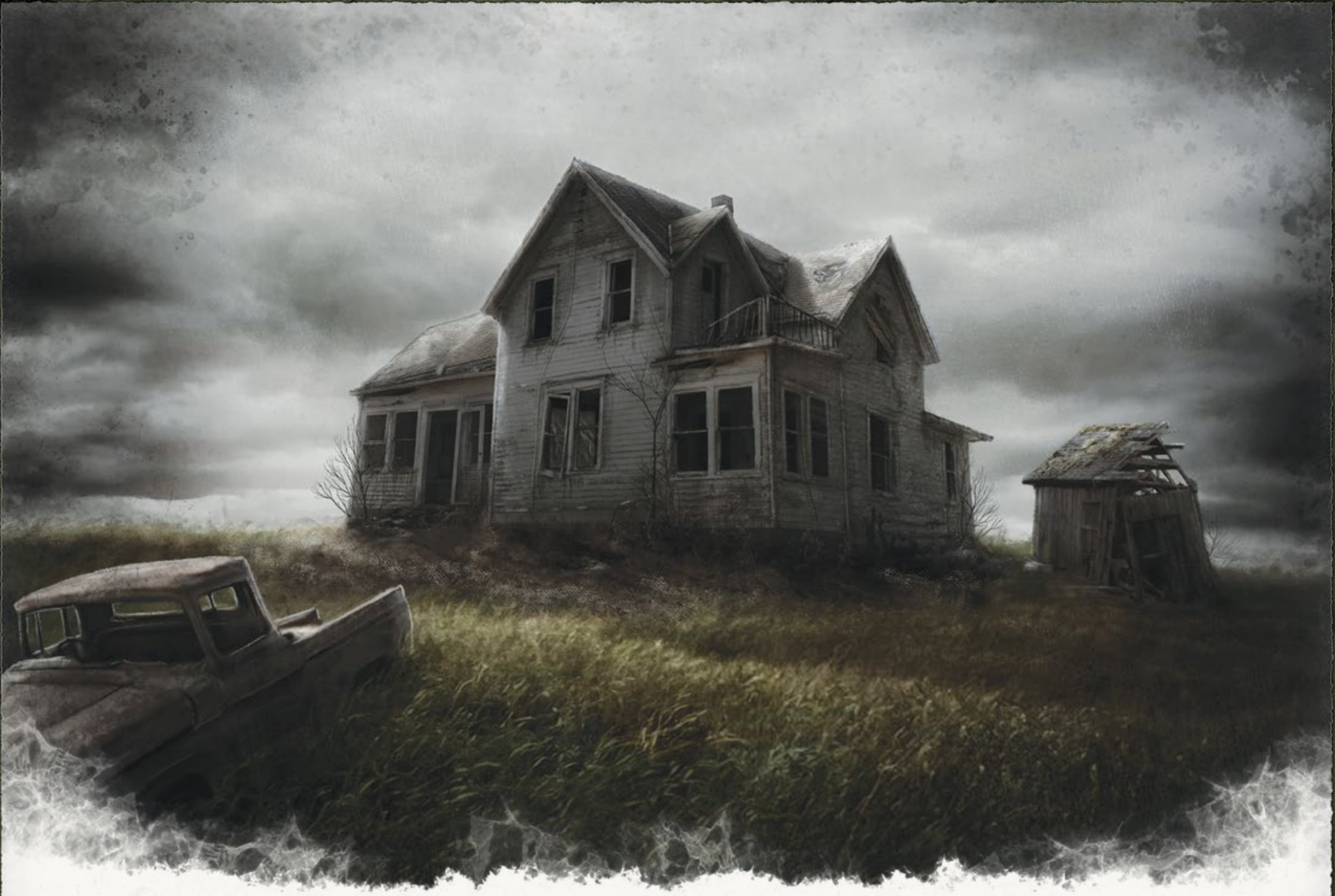
The lock on the door is broken. The inside contains all manner of rusty junk and tools, but little else.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

The material here assumes the PCs are investigating within a week of receiving the statement.

The front room has an old bureau pushed in front of the door, blocking it. The door has a window pane smashed, making it easy to reach in and unlock the door, but the PCs still have to push the bureau with the door, a difficulty 3 Might-based task. The back door is unlocked and unblocked.

Other than Timothy's short stay recently, no one has lived here in years. Those entering find the expected odor of mildew and dust overwhelmed by the terrible stench of death. The rooms are small, and most stand bare other than an old box, a single chair, or some



refuse in the corner. The stink comes from the only one of the small bedrooms with a bed.

That bed holds a horrific scene. Anyone that can stomach the stench finds a bare mattress on a steel spring frame. On top of the mattress lies a threadbare blanket and a chair cushion positioned like a pillow. The entire setup is coated in a dried morass of gore. Anyone in the room gains 2 points of Stress from seeing the liquified remains of Timothy Dunn. Bits of teeth, bone, and hair sit in what otherwise would appear to be a large amount of dried pink and red goo. Somewhere in there are Timothy's clothes as well, but no good can come from searching the mess.

Careful Observation, page 29

Although he didn't remember doing so when making his statement, Timothy stumbled back to the house and came in through the back door, leaving it unlocked and unblocked.

The Sculptor whispered in Timothy's ear "They call me The Sculptor now," but he didn't include it in his statement.

On the floor next to the bed are Timothy's wallet and smartphone. The wallet contains a few dollar bills and his driver's license. The phone's battery is dead, and it's locked with a password. Should someone break the password (difficulty 7) once the phone is recharged, they find the sent email to the Institute and a few personal messages. The web browser history still includes a recent search for "The Sculptor" and a selected result to a website of urban legends, which talks about a woman that haunts lone country roads and can reshape flesh like a sculptor. It mentions that she can cause a person's body to slowly liquify.

An investigator using Careful Observation in the house notes that there is an entrance to the cellar via a trap door in the kitchen (as well as through a cellar door on the outside of the house), but neither door has been opened in years.

THE CELLAR

The house doesn't really have a basement, but it does have a low-ceilinged cellar. Searching it (assuming the searcher brings light) has a difficulty of 3. Success indicates the characters find an old metal lockbox amid some rotting (mostly empty) wooden crates, scuttling house centipedes, and dead rats. Opening the box has a difficulty of 4. It holds very old legal documents of Harold Dunn—the deed to the property, insurance information, and so on. A copy of his will is also in the box, and it describes the exact spot where he wanted to be buried when he died (no mention of the book, however).

THE MAGICAL WARD

Anyone examining the outside of the house notices very old and very intricate mystic symbols and glyphs scratched into the wood siding here and there. An Intellect-based task with a difficulty of 3 is needed to determine these are part of a powerful ward to keep people—or perhaps one person—out.

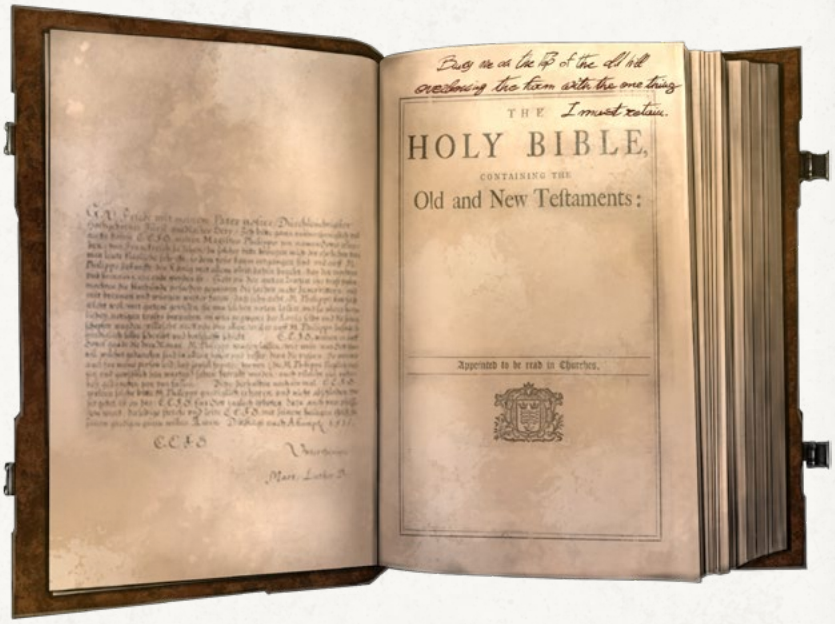
The ward around the house is specifically focused on Osteros. It will not keep out the PCs, just like it did not affect Timothy. That means, however, it offers no sanctuary against The Sculptor. She already knows the book's not in the house, but if the PCs retreat from her or try to use the ward to protect the book from her, they will fail.

THE CAST-OFF BOOKS

Next to the front stoop, an array of books and magazines have been kicked into the weeds. Timothy put them out for Osteros, but the old man—foolishly—disregarded them when he didn't see *The Boneturner's Tale*. The books were old even before they ended up outside, but it's rained in the meantime and now they're in very bad shape. Two of them are of some interest:

Abhalten is a book in German. Barely readable due to water damage and age, it is a book about using magical symbols to create wards. Other than determining its general topic, nothing can be gleaned from the horribly damaged tome.

The old black Bible found in the weeds has fared a little better, but it's just a standard King James Bible. However, written in faded letters on the title page in flowing handwriting are the words "Bury me on the top of the old hill overlooking the farm with the one thing I must retain."



Bury me on the top of the old hill overlooking the farm with the one thing I must retain.

THE
HOLY BIBLE,
CONTAINING THE
Old and New Teſtaments:

Appointed to be read in Churches.

THE HIDDEN GRAVE

Harold Dunn, Timothy's grandfather, asked to be buried in a grave on the farm. At the top of a hill about a quarter mile (400 m) from the house, hidden now by tall grass, a small stone marker on the ground beneath a sprawling apple tree simply reads "Dunn."

There are four different ways the PCs can find the grave.

1. The note in the Bible near the farmhouse door.
2. The will in the cellar.
3. The Sculptor eventually finds it, and the PCs can observe.
4. The PCs methodically search the property and succeed at a difficulty 4 perception task. It would likely take multiple searchers at least a day to find the grave.

Should the coffin be dug up, it's a simple one, almost entirely rotted through. Harold's remains are surprisingly well preserved, and he is clutching an even more well-preserved paperback book of surprising thickness titled *The Boneturner's Tale*.

GM intrusion: *A character in the cellar is startled by a rat. They must succeed on a level 4 Intellect defense roll or they yell out and stumble backward into an old metal shelf. The whole thing results in them gaining 2 Stress, and they're trapped under the fallen shelf until they manage to get out from under it (perhaps with help).*

GM intrusion: *At some point while outside on the property, the character is attacked by what seems to be an incensed—perhaps rabid—badger. If this weren't bad enough, it's been resculpted by The Sculptor so that its limbs are stretched and misshapen, and barbs from its bones cover it in horrible spikes. The tortured creature attacks out of anger and pain, fighting to the death.*

Resculpted badger: *level 2, attacks and Speed defense as level 3; inflicts a serious injury*

The Boneturner's Tale, *page 268*

Careful Observation, page 29

GM intrusion: *About halfway down the vertical tunnel, the character hears a pained creaking sound, and the plank they're hanging onto pulls from the wall. A Speed-based task is required to keep from falling the rest of the way and suffering 2 Stress.*

THE SHACK BY THE RIVER

About 2 miles (3 km) from the farm, a gentle river—more of a stream, really—moves lazily along. Near its banks lies a wooden shack with small (intact) glass windows. The door faces the river. The shack is old and a bit ramshackle, but there's a sense that it is still in use, despite the fact that no one is around when the PCs arrive.

Horror Mode is activated (or heightened if already in effect) when the PCs enter the shack.

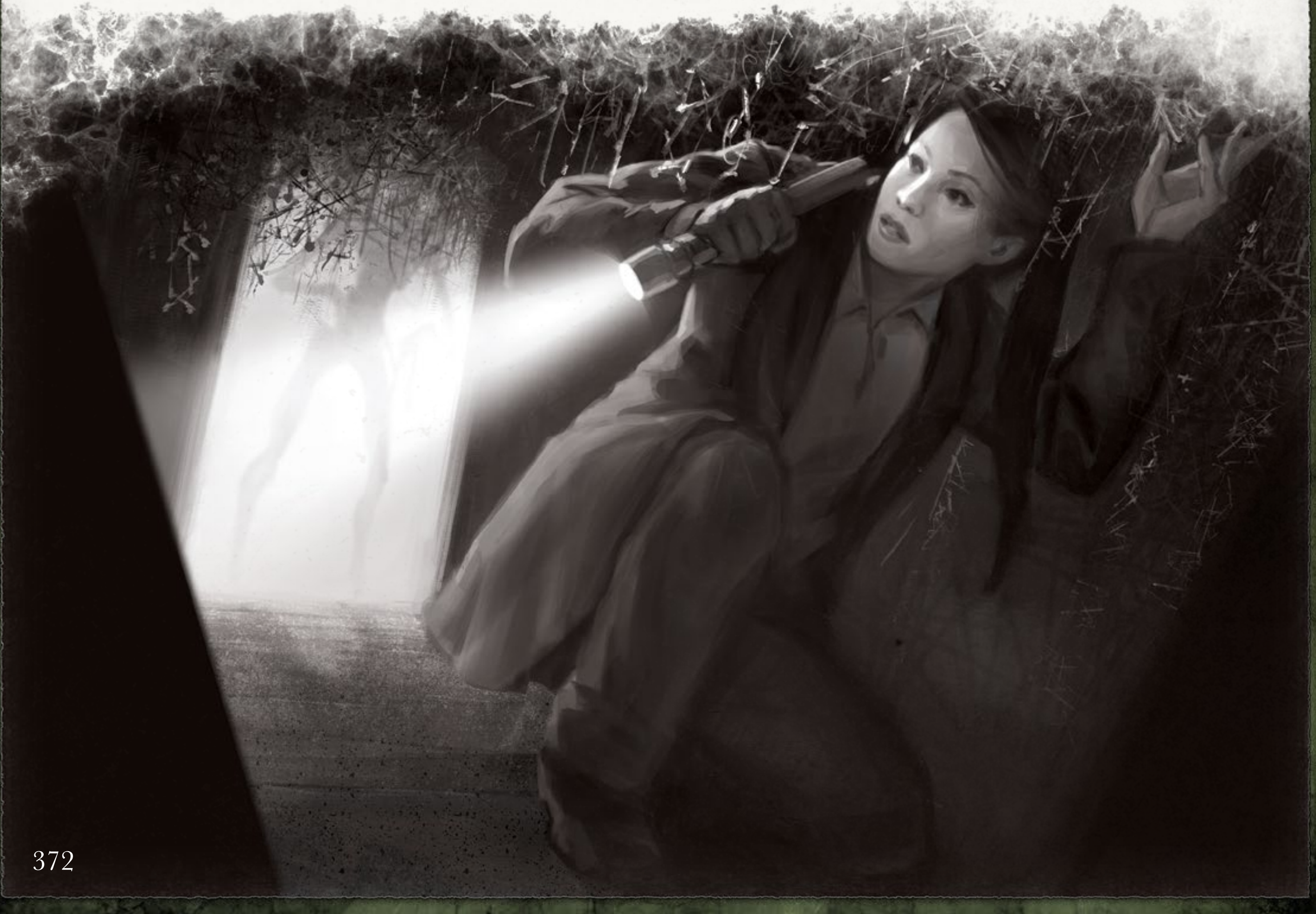
THE BONE EYES

The interior of the shack is a bizarre occult warning system. The ceiling is low, and small, delicate pieces of art assembled from animal bones hang from it. The hanging objects are all unique, and so numerous that it's tough to move through the shack without jostling one. To do so is a Speed-based task with a difficulty of 5. The bones are arranged into mystical symbols held together by wire and twine. Should any of them be disturbed, Osteros, in the chambers below the shack, is alerted.

If an investigator uses Careful Observation amid the bone eyes, they can determine that the only person to pass through this area is not careful about disturbing them, but is careful not to break them. (Osteros put them here and doesn't care about setting off the "alarm," but he doesn't want to break the sculptures either.)

THE TUNNEL DOWN

A fairly easy examination of the room (difficulty 2) reveals that near the wall opposite the door some of the floorboards can be easily pulled up. Beneath them, a hole drops down into the cold, dark earth, just big enough for a person to pass through. Wooden planks have been hammered into one side of the shaft going down, making a crude ladder.



THE UNDERGROUND CHAMBERS

At the bottom of the shaft is a small, cramped, cave-like room with a rough dirt floor. It's damp and cold, and there's little of note here. A tunnel leads off into darkness, going to the chamber where Osteros spends much of his time.

Osteros has rigged a trip wire in the tunnel between the chambers. If triggered, loose rocks in the ceiling fall and inflict a serious injury on anyone below. A Speed defense roll (difficulty 3) allows a character to duck back and out of the way of the deadfall. If a character says that they're carefully looking for such things, or even checking the floor, they find the trip wire without needing to make a roll.

The second chamber is drier but still has a heavy earthen smell. It contains a cot, a variety of personal items, some packages of snacks and sweets, many liquor bottles (most empty), and a battery-powered lantern. Books—all occult in nature—lie scattered on the floor, on the cot, and in piles here and there. Most are not noteworthy, but someone with training in the occult would recognize a few as being somewhat rare, although in poor condition.

"OSTEROS"

Horror Mode is heightened (or activated if not yet already active) when the PCs encounter Osteros.

Zachary Easton/Osteros is an old man wearing what looks to be a long grey nightshirt streaked with dirt stains. He's almost skeletal, but he's more solid and stronger than his thin frame would suggest. He seems confident and lucid, but in truth he lives in constant anxiety and fear.

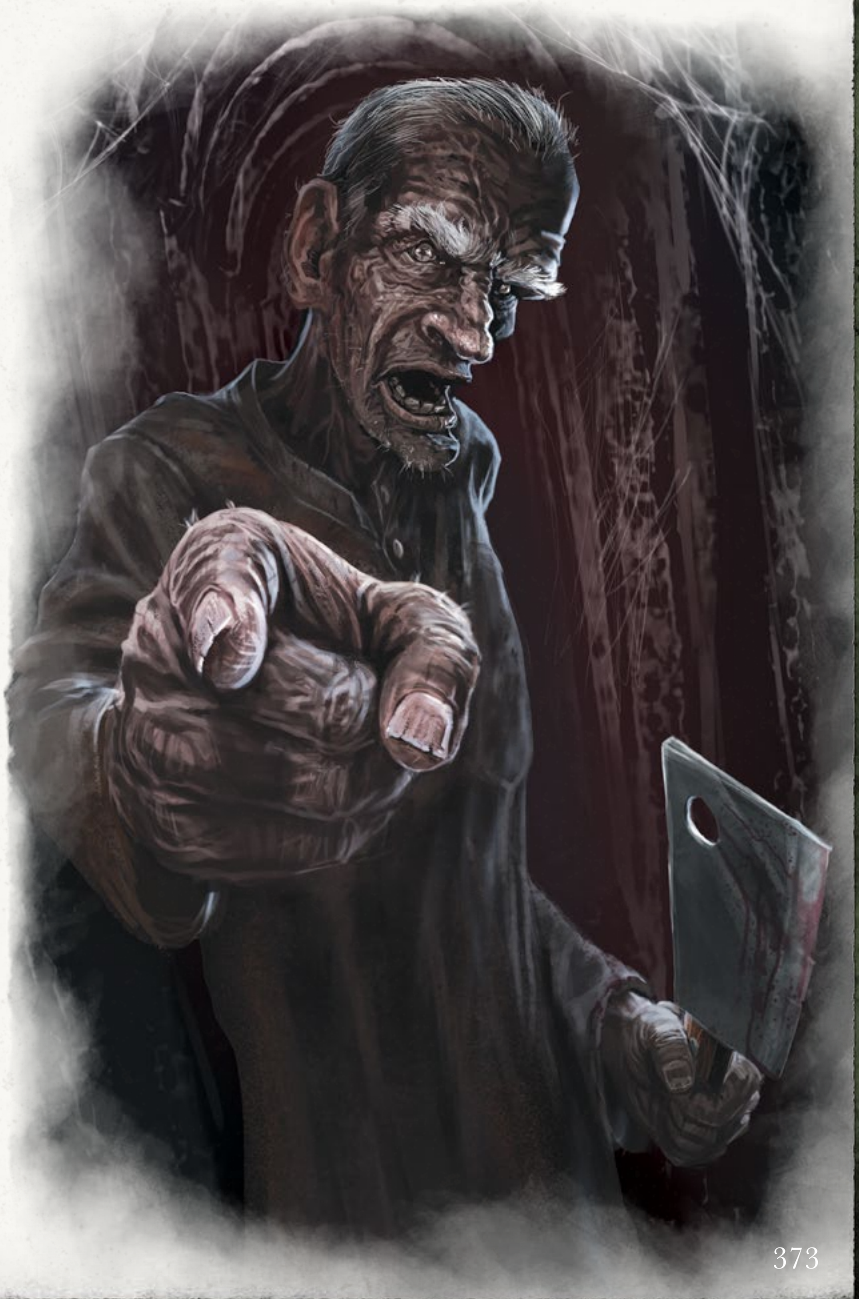
Considering his diet of nothing but alcohol and junk food, Osteros is extremely strong and tough for a skinny old man. His study of the occult has allowed him to greatly lengthen his lifespan and gives him artificial vigor.

If the PCs triggered the bone eyes above or the trip wire in the tunnel, Osteros is in his chamber, waiting for the intruders. He's angry at the trespass and has prepared his one sorcerous attack to use if they are at all hostile.

This attack involves him chanting briefly and gesturing with both hands. From his mouth, he spits up a mass of black bile that he flings with his hands in an arc, potentially striking all within an immediate area who fail a Speed defense roll. The bile burns and scars, giving those it touches 3 points of Stress and blinding them for three rounds. Even those who succeed at the defense roll gain 1 point of Stress.

If the PCs are not immediately hostile, he instead angrily demands why they are invading his home. Almost regardless of what they say, if he figures that they're seeking information, he tells them that there's a book

Zachary Easton/Osteros: *level 4, occultism as level 6, stealth as level 5; health 16; inflicts 3 Stress attacking with fists and teeth, or a serious injury with an improvised weapon; can see in the dark*



inside the farmhouse called *The Boneturner's Tale*. If the PCs bring it to him, he'll tell them anything they want to know. If they refuse, he kicks them out of his home, with force if necessary.

This is a summary of the useful information Osteros can share with the PCs:

- Osteros has been hiding for years from The Sculptor, a "servitor" of an Entity called The Flesh. He used to own a book called *The Boneturner's Tale,* and he wants it back because it can keep him safe from The Sculptor.
- The book will keep him safe because it will allow him to undo anything The Sculptor might do to him.
- The book is in Dunn's house. He knows this to be true because Dunn's father, Harold, put a magical ward around the house to keep Osteros out. (This, in fact, is not true, but he thinks it is.)
- Dunn should never have followed Osteros. Dunn should have given him the book. Now Dunn is dead.
- Dunn was killed by The Sculptor's flesh-shaping magic. Probably because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- The Sculptor is nearby, also searching for the book. If the PCs encounter her, they will die like Dunn, so they should be very wary.

If the PCs have The Boneturner's Tale, *The Sculptor would spare their lives in exchange for the book. This is not done out of mercy, but rather because the characters are now of no importance to her.*

OSTEROS FOLLOWS

Whether the PCs agree to get him the book or not, Osteros follows them. He's stealthy and very familiar with the area, so he's hard to notice. His only motives are suspicion and curiosity. He wants to see if they go into the house and if there's some way for him to use their actions to enter it himself (there isn't).

THE SCULPTOR

When the PCs arrive in the area, The Sculptor is scouring every bit of the countryside looking for the book. She's in no hurry, and she fears no threat. The PCs are likely to run across her only inadvertently, as Timothy Dunn did. (This should probably only be the result of a GM intrusion.)

The Sculptor would make an excellent recurring villain for a campaign, so she is written up here in a more complete form. See chapter 12 for details on how to read her stats.

The exception to this is if the PCs do something to draw a lot of attention to themselves. If the farmhouse burns down, or if Osteros dies through some action on their part, or if they specifically go looking for her, they absolutely encounter The Sculptor. She happily torments them with her powers, but if they have *The Boneturner's Tale* or she suspects they are somehow preventing her from getting it, her actions become direct and lethal.

However, since Osteros is following the PCs, if they encounter The Sculptor, he is very likely nearby. If he sees any chance to use the situation to get the book, get inside the farmhouse, or destroy The Sculptor, he takes it. The old man is potent enough that he can hold his own for at least three rounds against her, during which time the PCs could attempt to make good an escape.

CONCLUDING THE INVESTIGATION

If the PCs get away, they probably do so having solved the murder of Timothy Dunn. They may have escaped with *The Boneturner's Tale*, but if they did, they can be certain that The Sculptor will pay them a visit soon. (And Osteros will as well, if he is still alive.)

If the PCs work for an organization like the Magnus Institute, they can put the dangerous book into the Institute's care. This likely draws an attack from The Sculptor, rather than her going after the PCs directly.

Should the local authorities be alerted to the location of Timothy's remains, they investigate briefly and clean the place up. The house likely will be condemned and demolished and the land sold at auction. The authorities will not find Osteros alive or dead, and the shack by the river is found empty.

In addition to any awards earned through story arcs, each PC who escapes with the truth of what happened to Timothy Dunn gets 1 XP, and an additional 2 XP if they have *The Boneturner's Tale*.

THE SCULPTOR 5 (15)

3

No one knows the precise origin of The Sculptor, but it's believed that she was a woman in Eastern Europe who pledged herself to The Flesh sometime during World War II after her village was overrun first by the Nazis and then again by the Soviets, its people faring quite poorly both times. Today, she appears as a vaguely humanoid-shaped mass of twisting, undulating flesh, sprouting organs (eyes, a mouth, and the like) as needed, and wherever needed.

As her name suggests, The Sculptor can shape flesh with her touch. She doesn't hesitate to use the ability, which she originally gained from *The Boneturner's Tale*. While her long-term goal is to perform the ritual of the Last Feast, she knows that time is all but meaningless to the Entity she reveres. And because she can use her skills to counter the effects of aging with a thought and gesture, it's meaningless to her as well.

The Flesh, page 173

GM intrusion: *The character touched by The Sculptor passes out from the shock of the changes wrought.*

The Boneturner, page 201

Related Entity: The Flesh
Health: 30
Damage Inflicted: Serious injury
Movement: Short
Modifications: Might defense as level 8
Combat: A single touch from The Sculptor can result in a person's physical form changing, often to their detriment.

The Sculptor also has the following traits.

People as Playthings: If she's not in a hurry, with even a brief touch The Sculptor can make a single superficial change to a person. This change might be a facial disfigurement, a shriveled or twisted limb, the removal of a non-vital organ, or something similar. The victim must deal with the consequences and gains either 3 points of Stress or a serious injury (likely both). For example, stretching the left half of someone's face in a grotesque way probably brings Stress, but the removal of a kidney is a serious injury. Even if the injury is healed and the Stress removed, the change remains unless the victim has extensive surgery or someone successfully uses *The Boneturner's Tale* to undo the damage.

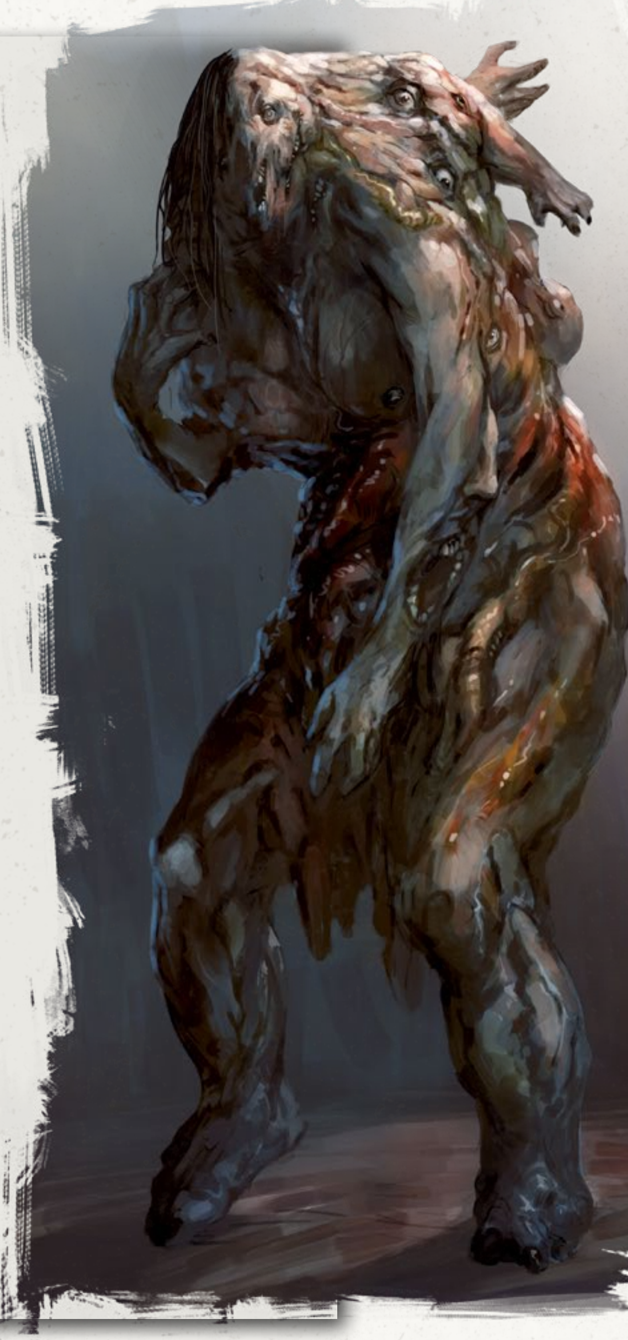
Liquify: If she can grab a person and hold them for a full round (the victim suffers no damage but must succeed at a difficulty 5 Might task), she can cause their flesh to slowly turn to liquid over the course of about six hours, killing them.

Quick Death: If she can grab hold of a person (the victim suffers no damage but must succeed at a difficulty 5 Might task), she begins violently reshaping them, inflicting a serious injury each round they are held.

Reshape: If need be, The Sculptor can shape her own flesh so she resembles a normal person. She doesn't like doing so, and it rarely lasts longer than necessary.

Interaction: Self-assured to the point of overconfidence, The Sculptor cannot be reasoned with. In fact, she no longer thinks at all like a human. She sadistically enjoys tormenting living creatures and sees them only as playthings.

Use: The Sculptor is a sadistic villain that can make an interesting recurring character. One day, she might come into conflict with The Boneturner, who not only wants the book, but also wants to be the predominant servant of The Flesh.



CREATING YOUR CHARACTER IN NINE EASY STEPS

Chapter 5: Equipment, page 97

Creating a character is easy—just follow these steps.

1. Grab a pencil and blank piece of paper (or a character sheet) to record your choices.

Chapter 2: Character Descriptor and Skills, page 15

2. Choose a descriptor in chapter 2, such as Brave, Inquisitive, or Scholarly. Most descriptors modify one of your stat Pools (more on that in step 4) and give you training in one skill.

Chapter 3: Character Type, page 27

3. Choose from one of four types in chapter 3: Investigator, Protector, Elocutionist, or Occultist.

Chapter 8: Character Arcs and Advancement, page 140

4. Your type determines your starting stat Pool totals, grants you a set of starting abilities, tells you how many cyphers you can have at a time, and gives you a list of other abilities to choose from. You can assign points to your stat Pools and pick your type abilities now, but if a later step in the character creation process changes your mind, you can come back to this step and update them.

Investigator Example, page 35

Protector Example, page 42

Elocutionist Example, page 50

Occultist Example, page 57

Chapter 4: Character Focus, page 58

Chapter 9: The Statement, page 157

5. Choose a focus in chapter 4, such as Fights Dirty, Needs No Weapon, or Solves Mysteries. Your focus gives you one or two tier 1 abilities, a suggested connection to one or more other players in the group, and perhaps some additional equipment.

6. Choose your equipment from chapter 5, starting with a set of appropriate clothing, three expensive items, two moderately priced items, and up to four inexpensive items.

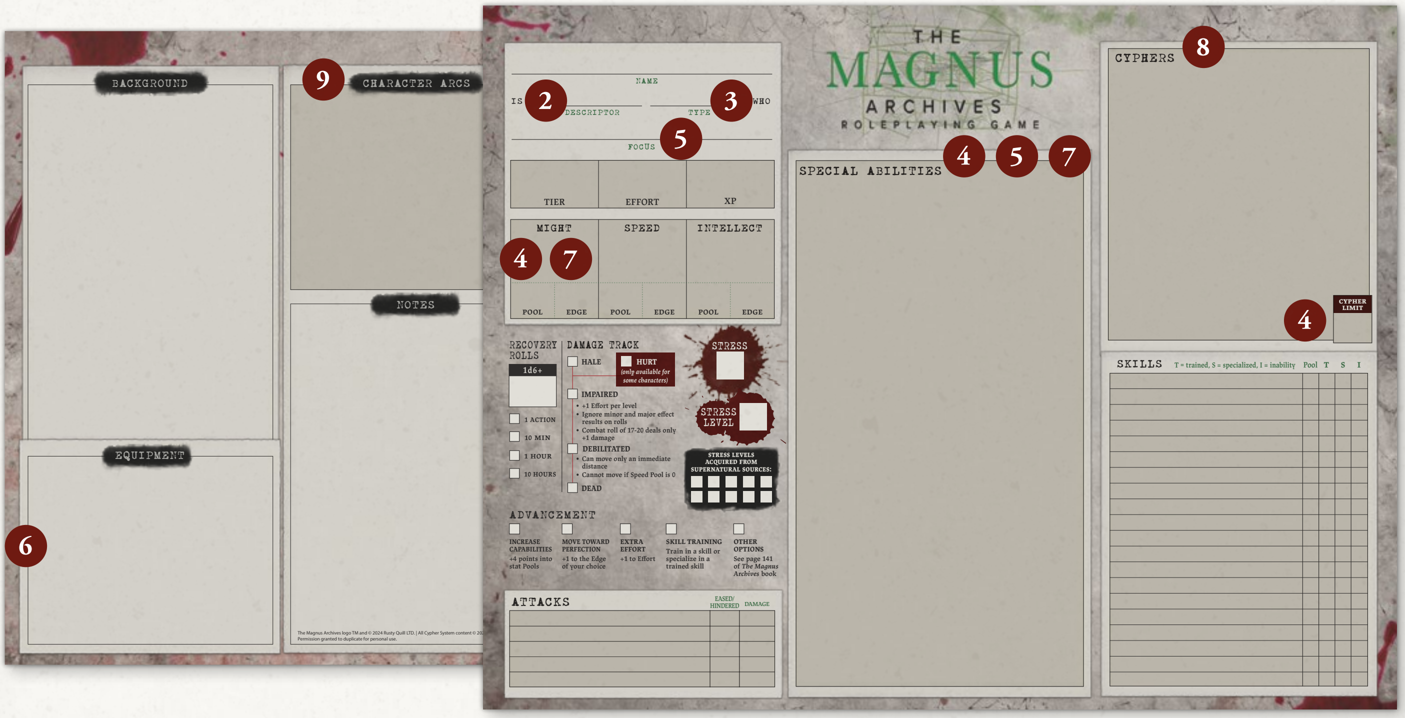
7. If you haven't finished assigning points to your stat Pools or choosing your tier 1 type abilities (from step 4), do so now.

8. Tell the GM how many cyphers you can have (this is listed under your type), and they'll tell you which cyphers you start with.

9. Choose a starting character arc in chapter 8.

If you need more help with character creation, each of the types in chapter 3 includes a walk-through example of creating a character (Investigator Example, Protector Example, Elocutionist Example, and Occultist Example).

Once every player has finished creating a character, work with the other players to create a statement about the first situation your group will investigate.


BACKGROUND
9
CHARACTER ARCS
NOTES
EQUIPMENT
6
NAME
IS
2
DESCRIPTOR
3
TYPE
WHO
5
FOCUS
TIER
EFFORT
XP
MIGHT
SPEED
INTELLECT
4
7
POOL
EDGE
POOL
EDGE
POOL
EDGE
THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES ROLEPLAYING GAME
SPECIAL ABILITIES
4
5
7
CYPHERS
8
4
CYPHER LIMIT
SKILLS
T = trained, S = specialized, I = inability
Pool
T
S
I
RECOVERY ROLLS
1d6+
1 ACTION
10 MIN
1 HOUR
10 HOURS
DAMAGE TRACK
HALE
HURT (only available for some characters)
IMPAIRED
+1 Effort per level
Ignore minor and major effect results on rolls
Combat roll of 17-20 deals only +1 damage
DEBILITATED
Can move only an immediate distance
Cannot move if Speed Pool is 0
DEAD
STRESS
STRESS LEVEL
STRESS LEVELS ACQUIRED FROM SUPERNATURAL SOURCES:
ADVANCEMENT
INCREASE CAPABILITIES +4 points into stat Pools
MOVE TOWARD PERFECTION +1 to the Edge of your choice
EXTRA EFFORT +1 to Effort
SKILL TRAINING Train in a skill or specialize in a trained skill
OTHER OPTIONS See page 141 of The Magnus Archives book
ATTACKS
EASED/HINDERED
DAMAGE

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Looking for more inspiration for your next game beyond *The Magnus Archives* podcast (and its companion podcast The Magnus Protocol)? Check out this list of media by *The Magnus Archives* creator Jonny Sims.

BOOKS

Collected Ghost Stories of M.R. James
The Complete Tales of H.P. Lovecraft
House of Leaves by Mark Z. Danielewski
The Grin of the Dark by Ramsey Campbell
Books of Blood by Clive Barker
The Shining by Stephen King
Uzumaki by Junji Ito
The Twisted Ones by T. Kingfisher
Tender is the Flesh by Agustina Bazterrica
The Only Good Indians by Stephen Graham Jones

MOVIES

The Thing
The Lighthouse
Ravenous
The BBC's *A Ghost Story for Christmas*
Carnival of Souls (1962)
The Endless
The Void
The Midnight Meat Train
Mandy
Event Horizon
Session 9
In the Mouth of Madness
Annihilation

TV SHOWS

Channel Zero
The Twilight Zone
Gravity Falls
Lovecraft Country
Neon Genesis Evangelion
Goosebumps
Sweet Home
Serial Experiments Lain

RPGs

Lovecraftesque
Deadlands
World of Darkness
Duskhollow P.D. (from the Odd Jobs collection)
Delta Green
Dread
Monster of the Week

VIDEOGAMES

Anatomy
Iron Lung
Soma
Alan Wake
Resident Evil
Amnesia: A Machine for Pigs
Silent Hill 2
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem
Signalis
Until Dawn

MUSIC

Lost Themes – John Carpenter
Gore Motel – Bohren und Der Club of Gore
Concrete Desert – The Bug vs Earth
Prelude in C-Sharp Op. 3 No.2 – Sergei Rachmaninoff
Orphans: Brawlers, Bawlers & Bastards (Disc 3) – Tom Waits
F# A# ∞ – Godspeed You! Black Emperor

AUDIO DRAMAS

I Am in Eskew
The Silt Verses
Malevolent
Lights Out (1934-47)
Archive 81
Unwell

INTERNET

SCP Archives
Don't Hug Me I'm Scared
Marble Hornets
Midwest Angelica
Creepypasta Wiki

MAGNUS INSTITUTE

Witness Statement

Vigilo-Opperior-Audio

Witness Name:

Statement Date:

Incident Location:

Incident Date:

Other Witnesses:

Statement

(Use additional pages provided if needed.)

FOR INSTITUTE USE ONLY

Statement Number:

Date Recorded:

Related Files:

Investigator Notes

Investigator Name:

Investigation Date:

Corroborations:

Witnesses Contacted:

Incident Updates:

TM and © 2024 Rusty Quill Ltd.

THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES
ROLEPLAYING GAME

NAME

IS A ______ ______ WHO
DESCRIPTOR TYPE

FOCUS

TIER	EFFORT	XP

MIGHT		SPEED		INTELLECT	
POOL	EDGE	POOL	EDGE	POOL	EDGE

RECOVERY ROLLS

1d6+

☐ 1 ACTION
☐ 10 MIN
☐ 1 HOUR
☐ 10 HOURS

DAMAGE TRACK

☐ HALE

☐ **HURT** *(only available for some characters)*

☐ IMPAIRED
- +1 Effort per level
- Ignore minor and major effect results on rolls
- Combat roll of 17-20 deals only +1 damage

☐ DEBILITATED
- Can move only an immediate distance
- Cannot move if Speed Pool is 0

☐ DEAD

STRESS ☐

STRESS LEVEL ☐

STRESS LEVELS ACQUIRED FROM SUPERNATURAL SOURCES:
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANCEMENT

☐ **INCREASE CAPABILITIES** +4 points into stat Pools

☐ **MOVE TOWARD PERFECTION** +1 to the Edge of your choice

☐ **EXTRA EFFORT** +1 to Effort

☐ **SKILL TRAINING** Train in a skill or specialize in a trained skill

☐ **OTHER OPTIONS** See page 141 of *The Magnus Archives* book

ATTACKS

	EASED/ HINDERED	DAMAGE

SPECIAL ABILITIES

CYPHERS

CYPHER LIMIT

SKILLS

T = trained, S = specialized, I = inability

	Pool	T	S	I

BACKGROUND

EQUIPMENT

CHARACTER ARCS

NOTES

PORTRAIT

Vigilo-Opperior-Audio

The Magnus Archives logo TM and © 2024 Rusty Quill LTD. | All Cypher System content © 2024 Monte Cook Games, LLC.
Permission granted to duplicate for personal use.

THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES

CONSENT CHECKLIST

The Magnus Archives is a horror setting and thus contains harrowing and scary elements that are inherent to gameplay. If going through this form makes you realize horror settings aren't for you, it's okay to step away and play a different type of game.

GM Name: ____________________

Player Name (or leave blank): ____________________

Planned Game Theme: ____________________

If this game were a movie, its movie rating would be: G PG PG-13 R NC-17 Other: ____________

Mark the color that best illustrates your comfort level with the following plot or story elements.

☐ **Green** = Enthusiastic consent; bring it on!
△ **Yellow** = Okay if veiled or offstage; might be okay onstage but requires discussion ahead of time; uncertain.
○ **Red** = Hard line; do not include.

	G	Y	R
HORROR	☐	△	○
Animal endangerment	☐	△	○
Blood	☐	△	○
Body horror	☐	△	○
Bugs	☐	△	○
Child endangerment	☐	△	○
Demonic possession	☐	△	○
Dismemberment	☐	△	○
Eyeballs	☐	△	○
Gore	☐	△	○
Mind control	☐	△	○
Mines/underground scenarios	☐	△	○
Mutilation	☐	△	○
Rats	☐	△	○
Situations involving literal darkness	☐	△	○
Snakes	☐	△	○
Spiders	☐	△	○
Witchcraft	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○

RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY	☐	△	○
Romance	☐	△	○
Fade to black	☐	△	○
Explicit	☐	△	○
Between PCs and NPCs	☐	△	○
Between PCs	☐	△	○
Sex	☐	△	○
Fade to black	☐	△	○
Explicit	☐	△	○
Between PCs and NPCs	☐	△	○
Between PCs	☐	△	○
Between my PC and another PC/NPC	☐	△	○
Family	☐	△	○
Abandonment	☐	△	○
Death of a caretaker/parent	☐	△	○
Death of a child	☐	△	○
Death of a spouse	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○

ADDITIONAL TOPICS

____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○

	G	Y	R
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES	☐	△	○
Bullying	☐	△	○
Cults	☐	△	○
Gun violence	☐	△	○
Homophobia	☐	△	○
Kidnapping	☐	△	○
Racism	☐	△	○
Real-world religion	☐	△	○
Religious trauma	☐	△	○
Sexism	☐	△	○
Slavery	☐	△	○
Transphobia	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH	☐	△	○
Abuse	☐	△	○
Cancer	☐	△	○
Claustrophobia	☐	△	○
Freezing to death	☐	△	○
Gaslighting	☐	△	○
Genocide	☐	△	○
Hanging/strangulation	☐	△	○
Heatstroke	☐	△	○
Miscarriage	☐	△	○
Natural disasters	☐	△	○
Paralysis/physical restraint	☐	△	○
Police, police aggression	☐	△	○
Pregnancy, miscarriage, or abortion	☐	△	○
Self-harm	☐	△	○
Severe weather	☐	△	○
Sexual assault	☐	△	○
Starvation	☐	△	○
Suicide	☐	△	○
Terrorism	☐	△	○
Thirst	☐	△	○
Torture (physical)	☐	△	○
Torture (psychological)	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○
____________________	☐	△	○

Do you want the GM to follow up with you to clarify any of these responses? If so, which ones?

____

____

____

The Magnus Archives logo TM and © 2024 Rusty Quill LTD. | All Cypher System content © 2024 Monte Cook Games, LLC. Permission granted to duplicate for personal use.

INDEX

Abiding Watcher, The 196
action 115
advancement, character 140
Agnes Montague 205
Anatomy of Melancholy, The 268
Annabelle Cane 246
Angela 223
Anglerfish, The 197
Archivist, The 198
area attacks 127
armor 100
artefact 248
  The Anatomy of Melancholy 268
  blood money pouch 251
  boatswain's call 252
  The Boneturner's Tale 268
  Book of the Dead 269
  calliope 252
  camera of occultation 253
  Catalogue of the Trapped Dead 270
  Chelicerae 254
  coffin of The Buried 254
  dark star 255
  dark wardrobe 256
  Dead Animals 271
  Death's game piece 256
  Dictionnaire Infernal 272
  DIG 272
  A Disappearance 273
  entombing crate 256
  Ex Altiora 273
  flesh grinder 257
  fractal pot 258
  gorilla skin 259
  A Guest for Mr. Spider 274
  Infinity Above: A Book of Astronomy 275
  A Journal of the Plague Year 276
  An Introduction to Higher Anatomy 276
  Joy of Eating, The 277
  Key of Solomon, The 278
  Killer's Song 278
  lonely painting 259
  mirror of beholding 260
  patterned rug 260
  pestilent scalpel 261
  Roaring Desolation 279
  rock eye 261
  security camera instruction manual 280
  Seen 279
  Seven Lamps of Architecture, The 281
  slaughter gun 261
  slaughter knife 262
  syringe of Dr. Snow 262
  Spiders Are Eating 282
  The Stalwart Hunters' Almanac 283
  The Tale of a Field Hospital 283
  thrumming cocoon 263
  The Travels 284
  web lighter 264
  web table 264
  web tape recorder 265
  Whispers in White Matter 284
  Yushanka chatbot 265
Artefact Dealer, The 199
artefact stats 249
asset 119
astronomy 16
attacking objects 127
Avatar 89
Awful Deep, The 176
badge or warrant card 84
becoming an Avatar 89
bewebbed puppet 200
biology 16
blood money pouch 251
Bloody Mary 189
boatswain's call 252
Bold 19
Boneturner, The 201
The Boneturner's Tale 268
Book Collector, The 202
Book of the Dead 269
books 267
Brave 19
Breekon & Hope 212
Buried, The 170
buried thing 204
calliope 252
camera of occultation 253
Caring 20
carpentry 16
Carries a Gun 60
Catalogue of the Trapped Dead 270
Cautious 20
character 9
character arcs 141
  Aid a Friend 145
  Assist an Organization 145
  Avenge 146
  Birth 146
  Build 146
  Cleanse 147
  Creation 147
  Defeat a Foe 147
  Defense 147
  Develop a Bond 148
  Enterprise 148
  Establishment 148
  Explore 149
  Fall From Grace 149
  Finish a Great Work 149
  Growth 150
  Instruction 150
  Join an Organization 150
  Justice 151
  Learn 151
  Master a Skill 152
  Mysterious Background 152
  New Discovery 152
  Raise a Child 152
  Recover From a Wound (or Trauma) 153
  Redemption 153
  Repay a Debt 153
  Rescue 153
  Restoration 154
  Revenge 154
  Romance 154
  Solve a Mystery 154
  Theft 155
  Train a Creature 155
  Transformation 156
  Uncover a Secret 156
  Undo a Wrong 156
character focus 58
character type 27
characters from the podcast
  Agnes Montague 205
  Angela 223
  Annabelle Cane 246
  Breekon & Hope 212
  Elias Bouchard 196
  Helen Richardson 216
  Jane Prentiss 218
  Jared Hopworth 201
  John Amherst 233
  Jonah Magnus 196
  Jonathan Sims 198
  Jurgen Leitner 202
  Mary Keay 240
  Michael Crew 214
  Mikaele Salesa 199
  Peter Lukas 219
  Sarah Baldwin 238
  Simon Fairchild 214
  Trevor Herbert 244
chase 138
Cheerful 20
Chelicerae 254
Chosen of Flame, The 205
clown doll 206
coffin of The Buried 254
combat 124
combat between NPCs 127
combat between PCs 127
Consent Checklist 381
cooking 16
cooperative actions 126
Corruption, The 170
cosmic horror 343
crafting stories 327
creating new creatures 320
creature 320
Cult of the Lightless Flame, the 171
cultist, Divine Host 207
cultist, Lightless Flame 208
currency 97
Cynical 20
cypher 105
  another twist (instant) 107
  big picture 107
  binary (instant) 107
  body builder 107
  breathing room (instant) 107
  burning desire (instant) 107
  cheating death (instant) 108
  curiosity 108
  dance through the maze 108
  deathly silent and still (instant) 108
  desperate effort (instant) 108
  eye contact (instant) 108
  flee The Hunt! (instant) 108
  gift of The Piper (instant) 108
  guess you had to be there 108
  gut feeling 108
  hard shoulder (instant) 109
  help from a stranger 109
  implore The Flesh 109
  jigsaw solver 109
  last words 109
  learn from The Web 109
  lesson of The Boneturner 109
  librarian's pupil 110
  like an Avatar (instant) 110
  meat 110
  nemesis 110
  nightfall 110
  observer effect 110
  of The Beholding 110
  of The Flesh 110
  panopticon (instant) 110
  personal space 111
  risen wind 111
  sculptor's tool (instant) 111
  show must go on 111
  smell of blood (instant) 111
  spiral's luck (instant) 112
  squirm (instant) 112
  stare into The Vast 112
  strange music 112

  taking stock . . . 112
  thought for the day . . . 112
  thrill of the chase . . . 112
  tightrope . . . 112
  uncanny valley (instant) . . . 112
  watcher's know-how . . . 112
  weaver's encouragement . . . 112
  well-being . . . 112
  what we all ignore . . . 113
  what we lose (instant) . . . 113
  words of the puppeteer (instant) . . . 113
dabbler . . . 209
damage from hazards . . . 132
damage track . . . 132
dark star . . . 255
dark wardrobe . . . 256
Dark, The . . . 171
Dead Animals . . . 271
Death . . . 210
death and player characters . . . 136
Death's game piece . . . 256
debilitated . . . 132
deception . . . 16
deceitful arc . . . 211
Deliverymen, The . . . 212
describing things . . . 340
descriptors . . . 19
  Bold . . . 19
  Brave . . . 19
  Caring . . . 20
  Cautious . . . 20
  Cheerful . . . 20
  Cynical . . . 20
  Enigmatic . . . 21
  Fastidious . . . 21
  Fearless . . . 22
  Ferocious . . . 22
  Hopeful . . . 22
  Inquisitive . . . 22
  Intimidating . . . 23
  Likeable . . . 23
  Muscular . . . 23
  Nervous . . . 23
  No-Nonsense . . . 24
  Obsessive . . . 24
  Pretentious . . . 24
  Quick . . . 24
  Ruthless . . . 25
  Scholarly . . . 25
  Smart . . . 25
  Sturdy . . . 25
  Superstitious . . . 26
  Suspicious . . . 26
  Tech-Savvy . . . 26
Desolation, The . . . 171
determining task difficulty . . . 117
difficulty . . . 117
discerning motive . . . 16
disciple of the Endless . . . 214
A Disappearance . . . 273
disguise . . . 16
distance . . . 137
Distortion, The . . . 216
distraction . . . 128
Does a Bit of This and That . . . 61
Doorway Into Corruption, The . . . 170
draw the attack . . . 128
driving . . . 16
ease . . . 118
easing the task . . . 118
Edge . . . 11
Effort . . . 11
electrical repair . . . 17
electronics . . . 17
Elias Bouchard . . . 196
Elocutionist . . . 43
enabler . . . 116
encounters . . . 124
End, The . . . 172
endurance . . . 17
engineering . . . 17
Enigmatic . . . 21
Entities, the . . . 166
  Buried, The . . . 170
  Corruption, The . . . 170
  Dark, The . . . 171
  Desolation, The . . . 171
  End, The . . . 172
  Eye, The . . . 172
  Extinction, The . . . 177
  Flesh, The . . . 173
  Hunt, The . . . 173
  Lonely, The . . . 174
  Slaughter, The . . . 174
  Spiral, The . . . 175
  Stranger, The . . . 175
  Vast, The . . . 176
  Web, The . . . 176
entombing crate . . . 256
equipment . . . 97
equipment operation . . . 17
Everchase, The . . . 173
Ex Altiora . . . 273
example of play . . . 351
experience point advance . . . 142
experience points . . . 141
Explores Dark Places . . . 63
Extinction, The . . . 177
Extinguished Sun, the . . . 171
Eye, The . . . 172
Fastidious . . . 21
fear . . . 345
Fearless . . . 22
Fears, the . . . 166
Ferocious . . . 22
Fights Dirty . . . 64
finding, identifying, and using artefacts . . . 248
flesh grinder . . . 257
Flesh Hive, The . . . 218
Flesh, The . . . 173
focus . . . 58
  Carries a Gun . . . 60
  Does a Bit of This and That . . . 61
  Explores Dark Places . . . 63
  Fights Dirty . . . 64
  Helps Their Friends . . . 66
  Infiltrates . . . 68
  Leads . . . 70
  Learns Quickly . . . 72
  Looks for Trouble . . . 74
  Moves Like a Cat . . . 75
  Needs No Weapon . . . 76
  Never Says Die . . . 78
  Practically Lives Online . . . 79
  Runs Away . . . 81
  Solves Mysteries . . . 82
  Wears a Badge . . . 84
  Works the Back Alleys . . . 86
  Would Rather Be Reading . . . 88
follower modifications . . . 71
followers . . . 71
forensics . . . 17
fractal pot . . . 258
Friendless, The . . . 219
geography . . . 17
geology . . . 17
GM intrusion . . . 120
GM intrusion, group . . . 298
GM intrusions in Horror Mode . . . 297
gorilla skin . . . 259
Great Twisting, The . . . 175
greyling . . . 220
grinning wheel . . . 221
A Guest for Mr. Spider . . . 274
gunsmithing . . . 17
gymnastics . . . 17
hale . . . 132
Hat Man, The . . . 191
healing . . . 135
healing (skill) . . . 17
heavy weapons . . . 100
Helen Richardson . . . 216
helping . . . 126
Helps Their Friends . . . 66
hinder . . . 119
history . . . 17
Hopeful . . . 22
Horror Mode . . . 122
Hunt, The . . . 173
Hunter, The . . . 222
hurt . . . 132
identifying . . . 17
immediate distance . . . 137
impaired . . . 132
inabilities . . . 15
Infiltrates . . . 68
Infinity Above: A Book of Astronomy . . . 275
initiative . . . 125
initiative (skill) . . . 17
Inquisitive . . . 22
Intellect . . . 10
Intimidating . . . 23
intimidation . . . 17
An Introduction to Higher Anatomy . . . 276
Investigator . . . 28
Jane Prentiss . . . 218
Jared Hopworth . . . 201
Jigsaw Lady, The . . . 223
John Amherst . . . 233
Jonah Magnus . . . 196
Jonathan Sims . . . 198
A Journal of the Plague Year . . . 276
Joy of Eating, The . . . 277
Jurgen Leitner . . . 202
key concepts . . . 116
The Key of Solomon . . . 278
Killer's Song . . . 278
Last Feast, The . . . 173
Leads . . . 70
Learns Quickly . . . 72
leatherworking . . . 17
Leitner: see The Book Collector . . . 202
Leitners . . . 267
level . . . 116
light weapon . . . 100
lightless beast . . . 224
Likeable . . . 23
lockpicking . . . 17
lonely painting . . . 259
Lonely, The . . . 174
lonesome crowd . . . 225
long distance . . . 137
Looks for Trouble . . . 74
Magnus Archives horror . . . 345
Magnus Institute, the . . . 179
major effect . . . 119
Man Who Wasn't There, The . . . 226
Mary Keay . . . 240
mathematics . . . 17
Maxwell Rayner . . . 239
meat with eyes . . . 227
mechanics . . . 17
medicine . . . 17
medium weapon . . . 100
metalworking . . . 17
Michael Crew . . . 214
Might . . . 9
Mikaele Salesa . . . 199
minor effect . . . 119
mirror haunt . . . 228
mirror of beholding . . . 260
monsters . . . 192
  Abiding Watcher, The . . . 196
  Anglerfish, The . . . 197
  Archivist, The . . . 198
  Artefact Dealer, The . . . 199
  bewebbed puppet . . . 200

  Boneturner, The 201
  Book Collector, The 202
  buried thing 204
  Chosen of Flame, The 205
  clown doll 206
  cultist, Divine Host 207
  cultist, Lightless Flame 208
  dabbler 209
  Death 210
  deceitful arc 211
  Deliverymen, The 212
  disciple of the Endless 214
  Distortion, The 216
  Flesh Hive, The 218
  Friendless, The 219
  Greyling 220
  grinning wheel 221
  Hunter, The 222
  Jigsaw Lady, The 223
  lightless beast 224
  lonesome crowd 225
  Man Who Wasn't There, The 226
  meat with eyes 227
  mirror haunt 228
  Monster Pig 229
  NotThem 230
  perfect stranger 231
  Piper, The 232
  Plaguebearer, The 233
  possessed cannibal 234
  Ringmaster, The 235
  Sandman, The 236
  silver worm 237
  skin shell 238
  Still and Lightless Beast, The 224
  Taker of Light, The 239
  Tome Hoarder, The 240
  uncanny mannequin 241
  vampire 242
  Vampire Hunter, The 244
  watcher's husk 245
  Weaver, The 246
Monster Pig 229
Mothman, The 191
Moves Like a Cat 75
Muscular 23
Needs No Weapon 76
Nervous 23
Never Says Die 78
No-Nonsense 24
NotThem 230
NPC health 124
Obsessive 24
occultism 17
Occultist 51
pacing 324
patterned rug 260
PC Avatars 89
People's Church of the Divine Host, the 171
perception 17
perfect stranger 231
performance 17
persuasion 17
pestilent scalpel 261
Peter Lukas 219
philosophy 17
physics 17
pickpocketing 18
piloting 18
Piper, The 232
Plaguebearer, The 233
player intrusion 121
plumbing 18
Pool 10
possessed cannibal 234
Practically Lives Online 79
practiced 116
Pretentious 24
price categories 98
programming 18
Protector 36
psychology 18
publishing 18
Quick 24
recovery rolls 135
religion 18
researching 18
retrying 120
riding 18
Ringmaster, The 235
Risen War, The 174
ritual 168
Roaring Desolation 279
rock eye 261
roll 116
round 125
Runs Away 81
Ruthless 25
Sandman, The 236
Sarah Baldwin 238
Scholarly 25
Scoured Earth, The 171
security camera instruction manual 280
Seen 279
serious injury 132
The Seven Lamps of Architecture 281
sewing 18
short distance 137
Silence, The 174
silver worm 237
Simon Fairchild 214
skills 15
  astronomy 16
  biology 16
  carpentry 16
  cooking 16
  deception 16
  discerning motive 16
  disguise 16
  driving 16
  electrical repair 17
  electronics 17
  endurance 17
  engineering 17
  equipment operation 17
  forensics 17
  geography 17
  geology 17
  gunsmithing 17
  gymnastics 17
  healing 17
  history 17
  identifying 17
  initiative 17
  intimidation 17
  leatherworking 17
  lockpicking 17
  mathematics 17
  mechanics 17
  medicine 17
  metalworking 17
  occultism 17
  perception 17
  performance 17
  persuasion 17
  philosophy 17
  physics 17
  pickpocketing 18
  piloting 18
  plumbing 18
  programming 18
  psychology 18
  publishing 18
  religion 18
  researching 18
  riding 18
  sewing 18
  stealth 18
  tracking 18
skin shell 238
slaughter gun 261
slaughter knife 262
Slaughter, The 174
Smart 25
Solves Mysteries 82
special abilities 12
special roll 119
specialized 118
Speed 9
Spiders Are Eating 282
Spiral, The 175
The Stalwart Hunters' Almanac 283
stat 9
stat Pools 10
statement, the 157
stealth 18
Still and Lightless Beast, The 224
Stranger, The 175
Stress 128
Sturdy 25
Sunken Sky, The 170
supernatural type abilities 27
Superstitious 26
Suspicious 26
syringe of Dr. Snow 262
take the attack 128
Taker of Light, The 239
The Tale of a Field Hospital 283
target number 117
task 115
Task Difficulty table 117
Tech-Savvy 26
tension 337
thrumming cocoon 263
tiers 140
timekeeping 138
Tome Hoarder, The 240
tracking 18
trained 118
The Travels 284
Trevor Herbert 244
trying again 120
turn 116
type 27
uncanny mannequin 241
Unknowing, the 175
Unpleasant Deaths table 271
vampire 242
Vampire Hunter, The 244
Vast, The 176
very long distance 137
Watcher's Crown, the 172
watcher's husk 245
weapons 100
Weapons and The Magnus Archives 101
Wears a Badge 84
  badge or warrant card 84
Weaver, The 246
web lighter 264
web table 264
web tape recorder 265
Web, The 176
Whispers in White Matter 284
Works the Back Alleys 86
Would Rather Be Reading 88
XP 141
Yushanka chatbot 265